

The official publication of Riverside County Farm Bureau, Inc.

A private, nonprofit organization serving farmers throughout Riverside County since 1917

## Key decisions affect the future of the family farm

Will the Board of Supervisors approve the extinction of agriculture as the new County General Plan goes to public hearings on March 10, 11 and 13? To date, local legislators have bowed to the agenda of state and federal wildlife agencies, planning consultants, the building industry and environmental activists in pushing agriculture out of the county through land use decisions unfriendly to farmers and rural land owners.

The proposed new county General Plan would devastate the county's extensive and vibrant agricultural resources by imposing new environmental regulations and added land use restrictions that exceed both state and federal current environmental restrictions. The plan proposes to remove thousands of acres of existing commercial agriculture and force the land into open space habitat for species. Agriculture will neither be an allowable use nor will it be allowed to move into other open spaces. Farming operations or expansions will only be allowed through a permission process controlled by a new agency of governmental regulators. The proposed reserve area is more than 153,000 acres in western Riverside County alone. Coachella Valley represents an additional 250,000

acres. Agricultural products grown, raised, and produced in Riverside County account for an increasing, not decreasing, variety and quantity of the food that sustains our



region, our nation and the world. Riverside County still ranks #9 in California and #10 in the United States in agricultural production.

By restricting agricultural land uses, this General Plan paves the way to force farmers to sell out to residential, commercial and other non-agricultural uses. However, it is also the plan's intention to control a farmer by governmental regulation so that they may only sell a maximum of 5% of their land every 5 years resulting in a 20 year process. And there are no promises that he will be allowed to apply to the regulating agency to sell even a part of his land. By taking farming business

decisions out of the hands of farmers, regulators would make crop choices...not farmers. The new General Plan proposes to require

permits to have agricultural uses on private property. Farming would become a burdensome permitted process mired in a bureaucracy that cannot adapt with weather, water and soil conditions as farmers do. The plan will deflate agricultural land values and if passed as drafted, it will make agriculture a non-conforming use in an agricultural community thereby forcing agriculture into extinction. And above all, by enacting this General Plan unchanged it will cause all lands the government wishes to acquire for habitat conservation to be regulatory acquisition - not voluntary selling...with no promise of compensation to the landowner whose land is targeted for acquisition for habitat.



**The future of agriculture lies in the hands of five men. The Board of Supervisors. Even though the Farm Bureau has attended all meetings of this 3 year process, made our issues known and submitted written objection along with proposed solutions to the inherent problems, our concerns have been ignored or rejected. The time is at hand for farmers, growers and ranchers to pay attention and make their wishes known to this Board of Supervisors. And the time is only one month away. Mark your calendar for March 10, 11 and 13. Plan to attend the public hearings. Plan for your future.**

For more information, call the Farm Bureau offices or visit our website for complete details of this process.

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## **Newcastle Disease Task Force Formed**

Riverside County is the only southern county to launch an aggressive campaign to contain and control the dreaded disease lethal to backyard fowl as well as commercial poultry. A county task force was created and coordinated by our Deputy Agricultural Commissioner. Numerous governmental agencies, county services and local legislators are participating in the task force. Poultry ranchers and private owners are represented by the Farm Bureau.

A local command post was established to house over 1,400 employees focusing their full efforts to control and eradicate the deadly disease. Representatives of UCCE Cooperative



Extension, CDFA, USDA, Office of Emergency Services, Waste Management, Office of Public Information and Riverside Farm Bureau met January 29th. Disposal of the carcasses has been orchestrated and an educational video is already available for land fill operators. It

is instructional in the exact process to avoid spreading contamination as well in biohazard handling and disinfecting of grading equipment.

Concern for all owners was expressed in the process to control the spread of the disease toxic to birds. Regulators have taken great care to be respectful and sensitive to the fears of private owners of pet birds as well as to controlling the disease that is devastating local egg production of the Riverside's fifth largest commodity. In 1973, the cost of eradication ran as high as \$56 MM. Today the costs will go much higher. Containment is the immediate goal while keeping commerce moving. Eradication of the disease could take as much as 2 years.

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# News in Brief...

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## **Williamson Act gets a hearing**

Several state Senators vowed to support Williamson Act funding at a local government committee hearing. That's a program granting farmers and ranchers tax relief on property to keep it in agriculture and open space. Local governments are reimbursed for the property taxes they would lose by the lower agriculture rate. The governor eliminated funding in his budget proposal, but after statements at the hearing agriculture is cautiously optimistic about economic support for the program.

## **Value of grape crop drops**

The value of California's grapes declined for a second straight year, according to a preliminary report (issued January 31st). The total value of grapes dropped slightly, to \$2.6 billion dollars. The government report says farmers of each type of grapes earned less per ton last year. Average prices for raisin grapes fell 8%, while prices for winegrapes dropped 5% and the average return for table grapes was down 2%.

## **Crime fighters aim to slow trespassing**

Most rural crimes ... from theft to poaching to drug manufacturing ... begin with trespassing. During Rural Crime Prevention Month observations, crime-prevention specialists are encouraging farmers and ranchers to report trespassers. The California Farm Bureau says rural landowners should post clear "No Trespassing" signs and document violations. Farm groups also seek to increase minimum penalties for trespassing.

## **Newcastle disease toll slows**

Crews are finding fewer birds infected with exotic Newcastle disease in the Southern California quarantine zone. More than 15-hundred people continue

a door to door search for backyard poultry. Officials say they have been surprised at the number of birds being kept by residents. Many rely on their chickens to produce eggs for personal use. The disease was first found in backyard birds and has infected a half-dozen commercial flocks.

## **Wash station established**

Members of the exotic Newcastle disease task force have established a washing station near the northern border of the quarantine zone in Southern California for vehicles that visit poultry operations. Truck drivers have been cooperating with authorities by having their vehicles sanitized as they leave the quarantine area. The disease is highly contagious among birds but does not affect humans. Eight Southern California counties are under quarantine. Officials hope to have an inspection station established along Interstate 5 in the near future.

## **Valentine's flower harvest starts**

Flower growers will accelerate their harvests this week, in preparation for Valentine's Day. The California Cut Flower Commission says many growers will start their pre-Valentine's harvest today (February 3rd). The commission says nearly ideal weather has aided production and allowed greenhouse growers to save on heating costs. Flower supplies should be ample, though the commission says there may be fewer irises available.

## **Survey gauges consumer, farmer attitudes**

Consumers hold strong opinions about farming methods, according to a new study. The survey indicated that consumers respect farmers, and want their food produced in an environmentally friendly manner. It also showed that most future farming practices are in line with those consumer expectations. The study

interviewed both farmers and consumers. It was commissioned by the American Farm Bureau in association with the Philip Morris Management Corporation.

## **Sunshine stimulates strawberries**

Warm, sunny January weather has proven to be excellent for Southern California strawberry growers. Production is higher than average for this time of year. The California Strawberry Commission says that if the weather continues to cooperate, there will be enough berries to allow retailers to run special ads before Valentine's Day. Strawberry prices apparently have not been much affected by cold weather that threatened the Florida crop.

## **Cherries need more chilling**

Mild winter weather worries cherry growers, who say their trees may not receive enough winter chilling. Fruit and nut trees need to be exposed to temperatures below 45 degrees for a certain amount of time each winter, in order to produce a strong bloom the following spring. Cherries need the most chilling hours. Farmers say the lack of chilling could bring an uneven bloom, and perhaps a lighter than average cherry crop.

## **South state rangeland needs rain**

Grass has already started to turn brown on some Southern California rangelands, so cattle ranchers hope rain returns quickly. Ranchers say a dry January caused range grasses to deteriorate. But they say grass and clover can rebound if it rains soon. Forecasters say the best chance for rain remains a week away. Ranchers have not yet started to rebuild their herds, which were reduced to breeding stock after three straight dry years.

*-- News items credited to California Farm Bureau Federation.*

# When the Last Farmer is Gone

By: Joyce Morrison  
([jmorrison@illinoisleader.com](mailto:jmorrison@illinoisleader.com)),

"When the last salmon is gone, there will be no more salmon, but when the last farmer is gone, there will be no more food," was a phrase coined by Klamath, Oregon, farmers.

Farmers and ranchers had to deal with dead cattle, horses, all kinds of wildlife, and thousands of acres of burned up crops near Klamath Falls, Oregon, when irrigation water was shut off without warning by the federal government to 1,400 farms on April 6, 2001. Many will never recover from this emotional and financial loss.

The environmentalists, without proven scientific evidence, listed the coho salmon (the salmon we eat out of a can) and a nuisance fish called Sucker Fish as endangered. They said it would be harmful to the fish in

Klamath Lake if the water was used to irrigate the farm land.

Farmers in the Darby Creek area of Ohio stood up and fought when U.S. Fish and Wildlife, in conjunction with Nature's Conservancy, tried to take their historic farmland to make a wildlife refuge and turn it into a wetland. Ironically, this land had been given to Revolutionary War soldiers, and they had drained the wetland to make farmland. Draining the wetland kept mosquito borne malaria from taking more of their lives. Their historical cemeteries bear the results of the wetland mosquito.

It is not a big surprise that toxic effects have been found in the dissolved organic compound or "muck" found in wetlands. "Wetlands release vast amounts of natural organic compounds, that while good for the

ecosystem, are bad for cities that suck their drinking water out of the Delta," said Stuart Leavenworth in an article in the Sacramento Bee.

My friend Sharon Votaw, a farmer who lives in the San Joaquin Delta of California, says thousands of acres of prime agricultural land are being converted into swamps.

The Sawgrass Rebellion is now going on in the Florida Everglades. About 300 farms and 25,000 homeowners are being flooded due to the Everglades reclamation.

The American family farm is under attack in one way or another in every state in the nation.

When you read about environmental attacks on agriculture, remember the farmer is thinking about feeding you. When the last farmer is gone, there will be no more food. We have never suffered famine in the United States.

The history of farming goes back to Adam and Eve. Jesus used farming in many of His parables. Sowing and reaping are basic to life.

Farmers can change from raggedy jeans into a suit and be off to a meeting at the drop of a hat. They were practicing "lifelong learning" long before it became politically correct. Today's farmer has to be intelligent enough to figure out the most difficult formulas yet have the stamina to work 16 hour days in the worst of weather conditions. Contrary to the "hayseed" image farmers and ranchers have been given, most are multi-talented and informed in almost every vocation. Today's farmer has to be a heavy equipment operator, mechanic, purchaser, bookkeeper, marketer, chemist, veterinarian, engineer, electrician, and the list goes on. He is tough enough to handle the worst of situations but tender enough to cry like a baby when he loses his dog.

In areas where there is no industry to supplement property taxes, farms and homeowners take the hit. The education system by far consumes the largest hunk of the tax dollar. The next time you hear the government

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needs more parks and open space, you can bet your property taxes will go up when that farmland goes off the tax roles.

When property is sold to a developer, there will be taxes generated but not when the government takes the land. In property rights, selling property as a wise businessman or being coerced into letting the land go are separate issues.

There is a difference between agri-business and farming. The farmer is the bottom layer of marketers, huge fertilizer companies, implement manufacturers, and the billions of people who work in the industry.

As Derry Brownfield of the Common Sense Coalition says, "Farmers are not pork producers, and farmers are not beef producers." They raise hogs and they raise cattle for a middle man to "produce them into a product for the consumer." The profit is not made by the farmer.

All of this is to say, the farmer is becoming truly an endangered species. He is getting the same prices for his grain and livestock today as he got 50 plus years ago. He has no choice but to take the price he is given.

The farm program barely keeps the farmer in business in a controlled market environment. Yet production costs keep soaring. Even some fertilizers are a petroleum by-product. So when the price of oil rises, so does the farmer's costs, not only for fuel but for fertilizer.

Last week the repair bill on our old 1979 tractor was \$6,000. We went through this with another old tractor a couple of years ago. These unexpected expenses hurt. We are just small farmers with an extremely small profit margin. By the time we make a farm payment, pay cash rent on rented ground, drainage taxes, property taxes, fuel, fertilizer, seed, repairs, and on and on, it is a blessing to break even. We are getting old, and our equipment is getting old. We cannot afford to help the next generation get started farming. Nor would we be doing them a favor if we did.

Worry is a constant factor. Will it be too dry or too wet, or will our health

hold? Last year we suffered a drought, and our corn and soybeans were the worst crop we have had in years. We can't afford to retire nor can we afford to hire labor. Health insurance is not part of the job perks. For a farmer to afford insurance, the deductible has to be tremendously high. Social security is not paid by an employer.

Our situation is not unique. There are thousands more out there just like us. When Al Gore told the Future Farmers of America several years ago at a meeting in Colorado that they should not plan to become farmers as we would be getting our food from third world countries, he was right on track. But is that what we really want in America?

We get more and more food from foreign countries. Factory after factory has moved to third world countries to escape the emission standards and regulations. They have access to cheap labor outside our borders. The U.S. is becoming primarily a service oriented nation.

"As we enter 2003, Department of Commerce data show that cumulative foreign assets in the U.S. are soaring past \$8 trillion," says ProFarmer CONNECTION's Financial Editor, Jerry Carlson. "That's enough to buy all U.S. farmland eight times, and give a few billion in change. Foreigners are blocked from buying farmland in many midwest states, but they are steadily acquiring nonfarm real estate and control of U.S. corporations."

Germany and France now own many of the municipal water systems in the U.S. We depend on foreign oil. Do we really want to depend on foreign nations for our food and water?

When someone tells me they understand farming because they visited their grandparent's farm and loved the simple life, I have to smile to myself. Living 24/7 is a bit different from an overnight visit. But treasure those memories, because unless we see changes in the farm industry soon, memories may be all we have left of the family farm.

Joyce Morrison is a chapter leader for Concerned Women for America and she and her husband, Gary, represent the local Citizens for Private Property Rights. She is Secretary to the Board of Directors of Rural Restoration/ADOPT Mission, a national farm ministry located in Sikeston, MO. Joyce is an activist and serves as a member of the agricultural advisory board of U.S. Congressman John Shimkus (R-IL).

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