



Media Release

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GOVERNOR FULLY FUNDS WILLIAMSON ACT

Thursday, August 24, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger stood among legislative leaders in Sacramento and presented and signed a balanced budget. For months now the agriculture community has been advocating for the full \$39.1 million in funding for the Williamson Act Subvention funds. Today, Gov. Schwarzenegger announced through the state budget that there were not going to be any changes made to the funding of the program. Agriculturalists were first alerted about the proposed cuts, when the Governor issued his May revise of the budget. According to a staff member at the Governor's office since the revise, thousands of calls, emails and letters have been made to the Governor's office in support of the program.

"The Williamson Act Subvention funds from the State are incredibly important to funding the program here in San Luis Obispo County," said Mark Moore, Vice President of the San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau. "Farm Bureau appreciates the Governor's support of this program and applauds him for recognizing the program's benefit to the agricultural community."

San Luis Obispo County Staff were quoted earlier in the year stating that if the Subvention Funds were not upheld in the 2007 budget it would be difficult to continue the program, not just here in SLO County, but for most counties across the state.

The Williamson Act Subvention funds, which cost the state approximately \$40 million, are only a drop in the bucket of the \$145 billion budget. However, the benefit that our state receives from the program includes the protection of more than 16 million acres of agricultural land in 52 of California's counties - much of it providing open space and wildlife preservation. In San Luis Obispo County, the Act currently protects over 750,000 agricultural and open space acres from development. Critical to the continued success of this program is the nearly \$1.1 million in subventions the state pays the county for the foregone property taxes.

The Williamson Act, aka the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 is one of the most unique farmland protection laws in the country.-While nearly every state has some form of preferential assessment practice for agricultural land, California's Williamson Act requires an ongoing 10- or 20-year commitment by landowners to keep the land in agricultural or open space use in return for property taxes based on the income producing capability of the land.

Thankfully a groundswell of support to maintain funding arose in San Luis Obispo County. Legislative leaders State Senator Abel Maldonado, State Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee and the County Board of Supervisors and SLO Co. Farm Bureau all went on record early urging the governor to preserve the budgeted subvention funds.

"The Williamson Act is the most successful environmental protection program in the history of California," said Moore. "State and local governments should be very proud of their ongoing commitment to protect farmland and open space though their participation in the Williamson Act."

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Mission Statement:

"To lead San Luis Obispo County in the protection, promotion and advocacy of agriculture for the benefit of our members and community"