



## Media Release

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### **WILLIAMSON ACT REMAINS IN JEOPARDY**

*Tough budget times call for wise decisions by our elected leaders. It would be unwise to eliminate a highly successful program like the Williamson Act.*

On Tuesday, August 21, California Senators passed the California budget including stipulations for subvention funds to fully fund California's Williamson Act. This however, does not mean California's rural land owners are in the clear. It is still possible that Governor Schwarzenegger may still line item veto this important funding. Without the Williamson Act, development pressures on San Luis Obispo and California's agriculture lands could cause leapfrog development, loss of open space and the paving over of some of the richest soil in the world.

The Governor is now challenged with line item vetoing approximately \$700 million from the approved budget to balance it for the next year. 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 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.

In addition to the property tax relief, why do more than half of California farmers and ranchers who participate in the Williamson Act? A statewide survey of 190 participating landowners in 13 counties identified three main reasons: participants believe that farming and ranching is the highest and best use of their land, they have an emotional attachment to the land and they want to pass it on to the next generation as farm or ranch land.

This is the first time that Gov. Schwarzenegger has proposed elimination of state funding for the program. Thankfully there has been a groundswell of support to maintain funding.

Members of the Legislature have told the governor that while they understand the need to correct the budget's structural deficit, they do not support a de facto repeal of the Williamson Act. Immediately following the governor's originally announced cuts, members of the State Assembly went on record in strong support of open-space subvention funding. In numerous individual and group letters to the governor, they urged full funding of the subvention. Both, State Senator Abel Maldonado, Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee and State Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee are on record urging the governor to preserve the budgeted subvention funds as they were passed.

It is vital that the Williamson Act continue to help protect our rural environment. California already loses nearly 100,000 acres of farmland a year to non-farming purposes.

If you care about the rural heritage of our county and state and the unique open space that this program helps to create and protect, join the San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau in preventing the elimination of the subvention funds. Call (916-445-2841) or email the Governor (<http://gov.ca.gov/interact#email>) your opposition of a line item veto today.

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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"