



## Media Release

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**Release Immediately: 05/18/07**

**The most successful environmental protection program in the history of California may be in danger.**

On Tuesday, May 15, Governor Schwarzenegger announced in his May Revise that he is recommending elimination of the Williamson Act subvention funds totaling \$39.1 million from the FY 2007-08 budget.

“If the subventions are not funded, it is possible that counties will be forced to discontinue their participation in the Act. This would come at a time when California is facing tremendous population pressure and would further jeopardize the economic and environmental contributions from family farms and ranches,” said Hugh Pitts, Farm Bureau director and representative on the county’s Agricultural Preserve Review Committee.

The Williamson Act, (California Land Conservation Act) currently protects over 750,000 agricultural and open space acres from development in San Luis Obispo County. 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. Statewide, the act protects 16 million acres, more than half of the state’s prime farm land.

In a letter to the Governor, sent on Thursday, May 17, Jerry Lenthall, Chairman of the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors expressed the boards concern over the proposed elimination of the subvention funds and requested reinstatement. “We believe the continued agriculture viability of many farms and ranches in San Luis Obispo County will be jeopardized by the elimination of the subvention funds,” wrote Lenthall.

The Williamson Act has offered an innovative approach to agricultural land protection for over 42 years. The preservation tool serves as a tax relief program allowing local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific land parcels to agricultural or open space uses for a minimum of 10 years. Without the Act, California would have suffered significantly more leapfrog development, lost much of our open space and paved over some of the richest soil in the world.

Eliminating the subvention funds may force some agriculturalists to sell their land to developers. This compounding effect would not only hurt this budget year but future budgets to come. If just one percent of the state’s Williamson Act land were converted to residential uses, the state would be required to reimburse local jurisdictions nearly \$60 million for the Homeowners’ Property Tax Relief. This would total \$20 million more than the proposed cut in Williamson Act subventions.

“San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau is urging Legislators and the Governor to retain the Williamson Act program by restoring money for it in the state budget,” said Paul Clark, San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau President.

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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”