



NEWS RELEASE

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New Conservation Easement Protects Farmland In Dixon-Davis Greenbelt

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DAVIS, Calif., September 28, 2009—Solano Land Trust has purchased a conservation easement on prime farmland within the Dixon-Davis greenbelt with \$4.4 million of city, state and federal funds. The purchase of the 488-acre Miles/Kidwell conservation easement caps a 5-year effort to protect a segment of the Dixon Ridge, a high quality agricultural region along the I-80 corridor, from future development.

"This project is a great example of how Solano Land Trust works with local land owners and all levels of government to leverage funds to protect important agricultural land in Solano County," says Ian Anderson, local farmer and Solano Land Trust Board President. "Protecting this property also helps maintain agricultural viability in this region. We all love the rural character of Solano County and the way we preserve that is by helping keep agriculture viable. This is just one way that Solano Land Trust protects our quality of life."

This is the third farmland easement in the Dixon-Davis greenbelt to be purchased as part of the local conservation plan. Previously acquired were the 196-acre McConeghy North/Ebey Laughton easement and the 254-acre McConeghy South easement. With the Miles/Kidwell easement purchase, the Dixon-Davis greenbelt now includes 938 acres of protected farmland.

The cities of Dixon and Davis provided local financial support to the project. Dixon's support came from mitigation fees collected to offset the loss of agricultural land due to a recent development. Dixon Mayor Jack Batchelor is pleased that so many partners, including local agricultural partners, could work together to make the easement happen. "This project proves that cities can control their borders by creating greenbelts such as the one that exists between Dixon and Davis," he said. "This

collegial relationship has enabled both cities to protect our precious farmland which supports the economy of both Solano and Yolo counties."

Mayor Ruth Asmundson was also full of praise for the project. "The City of Davis is proud to have worked with a local farmer, the City of Dixon, the Solano Land Trust, and our state and federal partners to protect this important farmland forever," she said. "The result is a positive outcome for all parties involved and is a tangible legacy for future generations."

Also partnering with Solano Land Trust to establish the easement and protect farmland along Dixon Ridge were the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and California Department of Conservation. According to Alan Forkey, Assistant State Conservationist for NRCS, protective easements that maintain the agricultural viability of working landscapes have been effective in limiting the conversion of some of California's most productive cropland. NRCS targets properties under the greatest threat of development and then works through partnerships with the State of California and local groups, like Solano Land Trust to leverage funds to protect high quality farmland in priority areas, such as Solano County.

The California Department of Conservation is also pleased to support local efforts to preserve farmlands. "We congratulate both the Solano Land Trust and the landowners on the completion of this project," says Department of Conservation Director Bridgett Luther, "and we encourage other Solano County landowners to consider the agricultural conservation easement option for their properties."

Until recently, the purchase of the Miles/Kidwell easement had been stalled due to a State freeze on grant-funded projects. "Solano Land Trust worked with State officials and Solano County to broker a sale of private placement bonds by the state to Solano County of \$16.5 million," said Nicole Byrd, Solano Land Trust Executive Director. "This deal enabled the state to unfreeze funding for this project (and others) so it could move forward."

The Miles and Kidwell Farms are located directly north of I-80, near Dixon's landmark "Milk Farm" sign. Excellent soil in this area makes it ideal for growing various row crops, including alfalfa, ryegrass, wheat, tomatoes, seed crops, corn, and sunflowers.

The Kidwell Family historically owned and farmed both the Miles and Kidwell Farms. With this easement, the current owner of the Kidwell farm, Denny Kidwell, repurchased the Miles Farm. The Miles and Kidwell Farms will be merged under this easement, according to Audrey Peller, land transaction specialist with the Solano Land Trust.

The Solano Land Trust, Solano County and the cities of Dixon and Davis have long recognized the potential for intense development pressure along this segment of the Dixon Ridge. In recent years, it has been an attractive location for rural residential development due to its close proximity to large population centers in San Francisco and Sacramento. In 2007, the Solano County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution in support of the conservation easement. The resolution stated that "Without conservation, the land proposed for protection is likely to be converted to non-agricultural use in the foreseeable future."

Byrd notes that projections by the Association of Bay Area Governments and demographic studies on farmland conversion in Solano County predict a loss of 16,000 acres of farm and grazing land by 2020.

"All of the partners involved in the Dixon-Davis greenbelt are making a significant difference in changing not only those dire projections, but the continued long-term viability of agriculture in Solano County and the state," said Byrd.

Solano Land Trust, which has protected working farms and natural areas in Solano County since 1986, manages over 19,000 acres of rangeland located throughout Solano County. Lynch Canyon, Jepson Prairie Preserve, King-Swett and Rush ranches, among other land trust properties, provide open space for the public with grazing cattle herds roaming amid equestrian, mountain bike and hiking trails. While most today enjoy these properties for recreation and the beauty of their natural resources, these land trust rangelands continue to offer a working landscape and important ecosystems that are the foundation for the ranching industry. See the Solano Land Trust website for more information: <http://www.solanolandtrust.org/>.

About the Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP):

Begun in 1996, the CFCP has provided \$65 million in funding to permanently shield 42,000 acres of the state's best and most vulnerable agricultural land from development. CFCP funding is available for new grant proposals. Landowners and trusts are encouraged to contact the Division of Land Resource Protection for information about the program and potential funding. The state also offers programs that provide financial incentives to keep land in agricultural use for periods of 10 and 20 years. For details, visit www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp.

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