

# The Board of Supervisors

County Administration Building  
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Martinez, California 94553-1293

John Gioia, 1st District  
Gayle B. Uilkema, 2nd District  
Mary N. Plepho, 3rd District  
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# Contra Costa County



David J. Twa  
Clerk of the Board  
and  
County Administrator  
(925) 335-1800

September 22, 2009

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger  
Governor, State of California  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Restore Open Space (Williamson Act) Subvention Funding (Section 9100-101-0001) in the FY 2010-11 State Budget**

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

On behalf of the Board of Supervisors for Contra Costa County, I am writing to urge you to restore the Open Space Subvention funding (Section 9100-101-0001) to the California Land Conservation Act, also referred to as the Williamson Act, in the FY 2010-11 State Budget. The State Legislature had appropriated \$28.7 million for the Open Space Subvention funds in the FY 2009-10 State Budget, but you choose to blue pencil this budget item reducing the statewide subvention funding to just one thousand dollars. We are very disappointed that your line item veto of the State Legislature's original appropriation of \$28.7 million in subvention funds interrupts a 38-year commitment by the State of California to local governments to provide financial support and encouragement for the preservation of farmland through the Williamson Act.

For cities and counties, the financial support provided by the Williamson Act subventions has provided a tangible incentive for local governments to stay in the program and initiate more contracts. This year's suspension of the subvention funding may be the last straw for some counties struggling to provide essential public services. Many counties are seriously considering exiting the program if the subventions are not funded next year. Here in Contra Costa County we will need to re-evaluate our continued participation in the Williamson Act if the state does not restore the open space subvention funding.

In addition to the fiscal implications for counties, we fear that eliminating the subvention payments is the first step toward a total unraveling of the broadest-based agricultural conservation program in the state. It is worth noting that earlier this year the California Department of Conservation released a report that documented California is losing its working landscapes at an alarming rate while simultaneously faced with tremendous population pressure that further jeopardizes the economic viability of thousands of farming and ranching enterprises. This report, entitled "California Farmland Conversion Report 2004-2006" (April 2009, CA Dept. of Conservation), found that in just a two-year period, from 2004 to 2006, approximately 275 square miles (174,014 acres) of farming and grazing lands in California were taken out of agricultural production!

As you know, California committed to reducing its carbon emissions and addressing global warming in a comprehensive manner upon your signing of AB 32 and SB 375. Please recognize that the Williamson Act is the ultimate complement to these measures. The Williamson Act strives to protect farmland and open space, land which in itself reduces greenhouse gas emissions through the carbon sequestration process.

The preservation of agriculture and open space is not just a local priority; it is – and must remain – a state priority. For more than forty years, the Williamson Act program has been an effective partnership between state and local governments and California's farmers and ranchers, we urge you to support restoration of the Williamson Act subventions in 2010 to retain this partnership and maintain the vitality of agriculture in California.

Sincerely,

Susan A. Bonilla, Chair  
Contra Costa County Supervisor, District IV

cc: State Senator Mark DeSaulnier, District 7  
Assemblyman Tom Torlakson, District 14  
Assemblywoman Joan Buchanan, District 15  
Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner, District 11

Gus Kramer, Contra Costa County Assessor  
Contra Costa County Mayors' Conference  
Contra Costa County Agricultural Advisory Task Force  
Contra Costa County Farm Bureau  
Contra Costa County Cattlemen's Association

Karen Keene, CSAC Legislative Representative  
Kathy Mannion, RCRC Legislative Representative  
Cathy Christian, Nielsen Mersamer