

Dates of Activity: January 2008 through March 2008  
**Seed Grant:** Farmland Conservation Model Program/Uniform Farmland Database  
**Grantee Organization:** Council of Fresno County Governments  
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### **Description of Quarter's Activity/Impact on Partnership**

Development of the Farmland Conservation Model Program has been proceeding at a very rapid pace. As a result, many tasks have been completed over the past several months. Some of those tasks include:

- Defined membership of the Farmland Conservation Model Program (FCMP) Advisory Committee and held the first meeting in January. The FCMP steering sought to identify industry leaders in the Fresno County agricultural industry to provide us with guidance and feedback on the development of the program. The first meeting was very well attended and we were able to get a lot of valuable feedback on our activities. We are convening our second FCMP Advisory committee obtain on April 17, 2008 to provide the group with another update and receive their feedback.
- Public outreach meetings were held the end of January to solicit feedback from interested community members. Two large evening meetings were held for the general public, one in Parlier and the other in Fresno. The meeting in Parlier was attended by only seven members of the public but those people were local farmers so the information we were able to derive was very good. The second meeting in Fresno was attended by around seventy members of the community. However, around thirty-five of those people were from a class at the local university but nonetheless, the information received was very good. One thing I will point out from the meeting in Fresno is it was interesting to see how little understanding the college students had on the significance of agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley. Once they understood the pressures at play against agriculture, it was refreshing to see their interest in the subject increase quite noticeably.
- The second part of the public outreach of the Farmland Conservation Model Program consisted of interacting directly with the agricultural community. Seven 'town hall' type meetings were held over the course of three days in the smaller outlying cities in order to provide participating farmers a schedule that worked with their harvests. The Fresno County Farm Bureau assisted us and did an excellent job of getting the word out to get a good turnout at these meetings. The meetings with the agricultural community were all well attended but what was most important, was the quality of the feedback received. This information has been incorporated into the Farmland Conservation Model Program currently in development.
- The GIS mapping exercise has been completed. This has been instrumental in defining what constitutes 'strategic farmland' in Fresno County and where it is located.
- Currently, the American Farmland Trust, our consultant is meeting with city managers in impacted communities to determine their thoughts on the Farmland Conservation Model Program. Information gathered in this process will be incorporated into the final report that will be completed within the next six months.

### **Planned Activities for next 3-6 months**

Activities for the Farmland Conservation Model Program are as follows:

Development of a 'planner's toolkit' for elected officials, policymakers and community leaders. The 'toolkit' is basically best practices, advice and guidance on implementing agricultural conservation practices in Fresno County and, eventually, the rest of the San Joaquin Valley. Development of the 'toolkit' is ongoing.

- The 'toolkit' is just one part of the deliverables for the Farmland Conservation Model Program. A final report will be delivered that outlines all of the findings and recommendations for the project. Development of the final report is expected to commence and be completed within the next three to six months.
- One of the conditions for the Farmland Conservation Model Program is that it is scalable and applicable to other counties in the San Joaquin Valley. Standardizing the activities of making up this project will be documented so that they can be easily implemented in other communities. Completion of this task is expected to take place within the next six months.

In November 2007, the Council of Fresno County Governments put this project on fast track to have it completed by August/September 2008 so that data can be incorporated into the Blueprint planning process taking place Valleywide. This project is currently on task to be completed on time in August/September 2008.

### **Challenges/Problems/Bottlenecks/Feedback**

There are no significant challenges, problems or bottlenecks. The only challenge has been to coordinate the schedules of many different stakeholders. Many of these stakeholders are elected officials, business leaders, civic leaders and community leaders and have demanding schedules; so getting everyone in the same place has been challenging.

The feedback received on the Farmland Conservation Model Program to date has been very positive. Most everyone has indicated there is a need for the program. Many—especially those in the general public who are not in the agricultural industry—have mentioned how they were not aware of the significance that agriculture has on the economy as well as society. To date, we really have not received any negative comments or feedback.