

Quarter/Dates of Activity: Q2 October 2007 through December 2007
Seed Grant: Farmland Conservation Model Program/Uniform Farmland Database
Grantee Organization: Council of Fresno County Governments
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Description of this Quarter's Activity, and impact on Partnership Goals and Objectives:

Activities completed in the second quarter of this seed grant include:

- Completion of the GIS mapping exercise.
- Identify and outreach to key decision makers for the Farmland Conservation Model Program.
- Plan for and finalize outreach to the general public and the agricultural community for feedback on work completed thus far.
- Incorporate initial feedback and suggestions into the GIS mapping exercise that is a major part of the Farmland Conservation Model Program.
- Begin the process of identifying the threats to agriculture in Fresno County.
- Begin development of the Farmland Conservation 'best practices toolkit' for elected officials and decision makers.

All of these activities impact partnership goals and objectives because they are all needed to create the Farmland Conservation Model Program. The Farmland Conservation Model Program fits within Partnership Goals and Objectives and is complementary to the Blue Print planning process currently in process within the eight counties making up the San Joaquin Valley.

Planned Activities for next 3-6 months:

As of this writing, outreach to the general public and the agricultural community has taken place. We are incorporating all of the feedback received in this process into the information and data that has been compiled thus far.

In the next three months, the 'Farmland Conservation Toolkit' for decision makers and elected officials will be completed. This is intended as a detailed description of best practices in the area of farmland conservation that is designed to guide and inform policy makers on what is working and what is not. The information will also be presented in a manner that makes it pertinent to the unique needs and characteristics of Fresno County and the San Joaquin Valley. The identification of funding mechanisms to implement farmland conservation in Fresno County is an objective of the program.

At the end of six months, the majority of tasks outlined for the Farmland Conservation Model Program will be completed. As of the time of this writing, development of the program is right on schedule for completion in August of 2008.

Challenges/Problems/Bottlenecks/Feedback

We have had a couple of minor challenges in developing the Farmland Conservation Model Program. Those challenges include:

1. Finding the necessary data to incorporate into the GIS mapping exercise for Fresno County. Most of the data was relatively straight forward. However, data on the location and quantity of water in terms of water storage underground sources has been challenging. We ultimately had to rely upon the knowledge of the Fresno County Department of Agriculture for this data. Regional managers were consulted to provide feedback on their knowledge of water within their respective areas of jurisdiction. Initial feedback provided thus far from the agricultural community seems to corroborate with that information provided by the Fresno County Department of Agriculture.
2. While feedback from the general public on the Farmland Conservation Model Program was very good, we would have liked there to have been a better turnout at the events that were held. In Parlier, only ten people participated in this process. The quality of the feedback that we received was very high. Over sixty people participated in our outreach in Fresno. Thirty of those participants were students from Fresno Pacific University with the balance

being from the general public. While participation was good, we would have liked for it to have been better.

3. The feedback we have received on the Farmland Conservation Model Program has been very positive. Most people with whom we have spoken realize that diminishing farmlands is a problem. The feedback received suggests that this effort is timely. In the meetings held with the general public, the response has been surprise at the size and impact of the agricultural sector in Fresno County. Once the data is reviewed with participants, they almost unanimously agree that resolving this matter sooner rather than later is an urgent matter.

If you have coordinated any outreach, please describe briefly.

So far to date, we have had outreach to the general public as well as the agricultural community. Overall, we are satisfied with the feedback that we have received from both groups but feel as though participation could have been better.

Outreach to the general public took place on January 16, 2008 at the UC Kearney Ag Center in Parlier. There were ten people in attendance, three of which were land owners in the area. While we did not have the quantity of people present that we would have liked, the quality of feedback we did receive was very good. By not having a large turnout, participants were able to be very candid about their viewpoints towards agricultural conservation.

The second public outreach event took place at the UC Merced Fresno center on January 17, 2008. There were about sixty people in attendance including a class of thirty students from Fresno Pacific University. The feedback generated in this event was along the lines of that received the previous evening in Parlier. At both events, it was apparent that participants all realize that something must be done sooner rather than later in order to preserve this valuable resource.

Participation of the agricultural community was conducted in partnership with the Fresno County Farm Bureau. The Seed Grant consultant, the American Farmland Trust, teamed with the Farm Bureau to hold small meetings for breakfast and lunch in several small communities throughout Fresno County. Six to eight meetings were held in local meeting places such as restaurants with groups of four to six farmers in order to solicit their feedback on what is important to them. By holding these meetings in small, intimate, and familiar settings, it was hoped that farmers would feel comfortable enough to candidly offer their opinions and feedback. Based on the information received, this effort was successful.

Overall, the feedback received is of great value to the seed grant outcomes. This information is being incorporated into the Farmland Conservation Model Program that is currently in progress.