



Vanishing Farms

Objective: Students will gain an understanding of the pressures to develop on open space and farms.

Summary: Students will role-play farmer, crops, farm animals and the different types of interests that also desire land.

Time: 45 minutes

Student Grouping: Whole class

Materials: 10' piece of string with ends tied together to make a circle

Background Information: Every year three million acres of farmland are lost to some sort of development. If this continues, eventually there will not be enough land to grow food. Localities have begun to make ordinances and laws that facilitate maintaining agricultural land. The issue of private rights versus the common good is brought into play in these situations.

Marin Ag. Facts: The debate over land use is very real to Marin. For years there have been efforts to preserve county agricultural lands. Many people have been involved, particularly since the 1970s, in making it feasible for farmers to keep farming in spite of the skyrocketing prices of land in the area. The Williamson Act, passed in 1965 and amended in 1970 and 1999, allows for reduced property taxes for agricultural lands within certain areas. MALT, the Marin Agricultural Land Trust, purchases agricultural easements, restricting future uses of property to agriculture and recreation. Without these types of provisions, much more development would be inevitable. See the Marin Ag. Facts section of "Land Plans" on page 101 for more information.

Preparation:

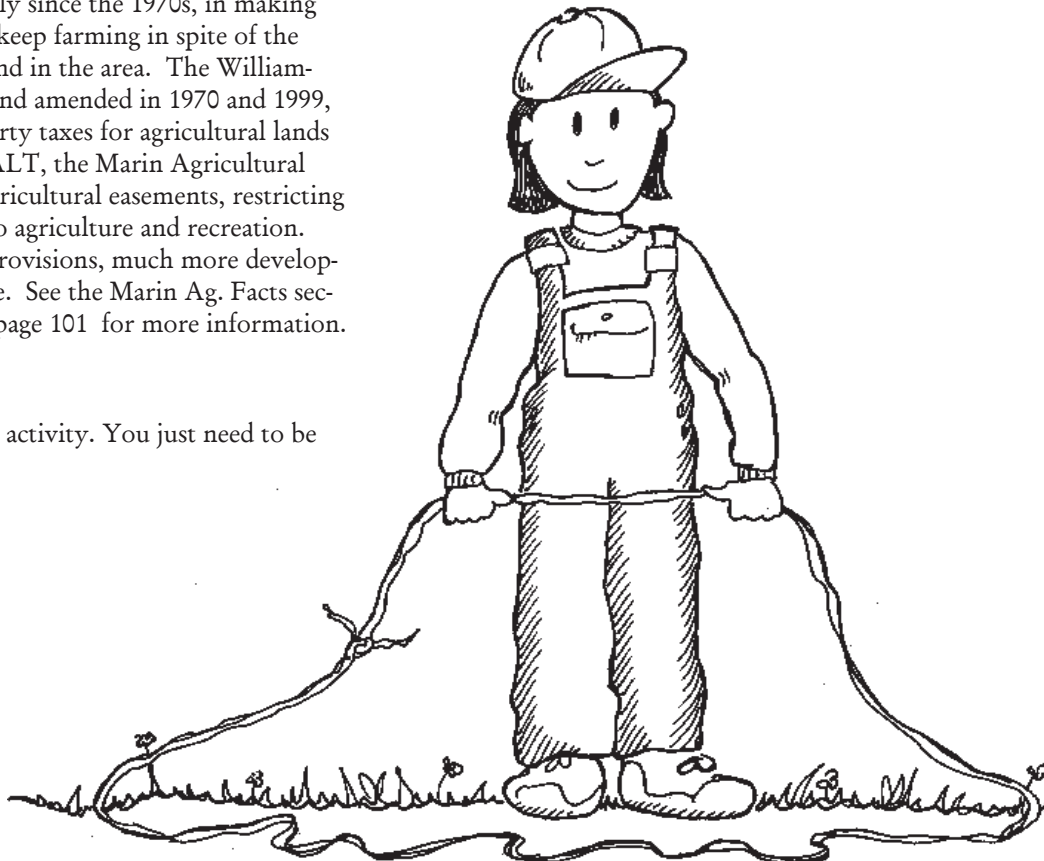
1. This is a very simple activity. You just need to be

familiar with the exercise so it will flow smoothly in class.

2. Acquire your 10' of string and decide where you will lay it out.

Procedure:

1. Place the string on the ground in a circle.





2. Assign one student the role of “Farmer.”
3. The farmer lists the crops and livestock he would need in order to feed and clothe the local people. As the farmer names the things on his list (like corn, wheat, cows, sheep, fruit) a student is selected to step into the circle and represent the commodity named.
4. One by one the rest of the students become people who also want to use the farmland: for example, a road builder, someone developing a shopping center, someone digging for water, a school builder, a hotel owner. These people move to the edge of the farmland, pick up the string and move it inward, making the circle smaller.
5. Developers continue until the farm circle is too small to hold all the farmer’s livestock and crops. There has been too much development in the area and thus the farm has vanished.
6. Discuss the activity with the students.

- Would this affect prices?
- What can all those developers do?
- What can farmers do?
- How does development and loss of farmland affect the families in the community?

Extensions:

- Have a farmer and developer come to the class and talk about their ideal plan for land use in the area.
- Find some old pictures of the school area (check with a local historical society or local paper) and compare the open space then and now.

Activity from Project Seasons

Questions for Discussion:

- How does development pressure affect food production?

How does Marin Agricultural Land Trust work?

Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) seeks to permanently protect Marin’s agricultural lands by purchasing agricultural easements from ranchers.

An *easement* is a legal property right and can address many of the ways in which land can be used. An *agricultural easement* is one which allow the land to be used for agricultural purposes. MALT buys agricultural easements and then permanently assures that they are not sold off to allow subdivision of the land for development.

Agricultural easements are always sold willingly by ranchers and allow them to get cash for farming operations, to make improvements, or meet other needs. The farmer selling the agricultural easement still owns the property, and the land is guaranteed to stay in agricultural production.

MALT was formed by a coalition of ranchers and environmentalists in 1980 and is considered a national model for agricultural land preservation.

