

Central Valley Farmland Trust
Maxwell Norton, UC Cooperative Extension

Concerned agriculturalists in the north San Joaquin Valley (NSJV) have organized a land trust to focus specifically on production farmland with emphasis on prime farmland. Clientele are farmers, developers and local governments. Farmers are offered the option of donating or selling agricultural conservation easements (ACE) for estate planning or business reasons. The current service area is Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced Counties.

Regardless of who funds the acquisition, farmers will need a qualified land trust to facilitate the process. Developers who need to mitigate the loss of farmland will need a qualified organization to accept and manage ACE. Local governments who wish to implement a mitigation program will need to have a qualified organization who is capable of accepting both ACE and mitigation fees that must be used for farmland preservation. Since the management of land for wildlife, open space and even rangeland uses require unique skill sets and organizational structures, it was determined that a trust with specific expertise in production farmland was needed for the NSJV.

In order to gain the trust of farmers, farmers must play a prominent role in the operation of the organization. The principle challenges for this type of organization are: 1. Funding operations (staff, office, transportation, education and outreach), 2. Developing organizational capacity to handle complicated transactions, conduct educational, and outreach efforts, 3. Recruiting landowners during periods of escalating land prices. The actual transactions are often funded with grants from state and federal programs as well as some private foundations. More information about the Central Valley Farmland Trust is at: **valleyfarmland.org**.