



S O N O M A C O U N T Y

**AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION
AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT**

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Contact:

Peggy Flynn

Community Relations Manager

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

707.565.7347 office

707.293.4592 cell

District Protects Land for Local Food Production

Groundbreaking pilot program helps keep family farming viable in the County

SANTA ROSA, Calif.—In an action to ensure that agricultural use continues on a 9-acre farm just southwest of Sebastopol, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, acting as the District's Board of Directors, approved an agreement between the District and John Guardino, a local farmer and resource conservation professional who is purchasing the property to grow fruit and vegetable crops.

"As leaders in the state for agricultural preservation, we continue to look for tools to preserve family farming in Sonoma County," said Second District Supervisor Mike Kerns. "Combined with the protection of one of our most ecologically-sensitive marshes, this project is a model for other resource agencies. Today's milestone strengthens our mission to ensure that agricultural land will be available for future farmers."

The agreement includes the acquisition of a conservation easement and an affirmative agricultural easement over the property which ensures that the land remains in agricultural use forever. Additionally, the conservation easement provides protection for the Cunningham Marsh and Creek on the property which is recognized by the County and resource agencies as a significant wetland area, with habitat that exists in very few places.

"This project brings so many benefits to Sonoma County," said Wendy Eliot, Conservation Director for the Sonoma Land Trust, the organization, along with the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, that is leading the development of a conservation plan for Cunningham Marsh and two other marsh systems in the county. "It ensures affordable farming, while protecting a rare remnant of wetlands that, because of climate change, are no longer common in Sonoma County."

According to John Herrick, member of the Milo Baker Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, the unique aspects of this project are also reflected in the responsibility undertaken by Guardino, the purchaser of the land. "With John's commitment to an eco-responsible operation and proper stewardship, we can reduce sediment and nutrients flowing into Blucher Creek, and ultimately Laguna de Santa Rosa, which protects the water quality and habitat."

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Located on Cunningham Road, the property is adjacent to one of the most ecologically sensitive areas in northern California—a 19-acre portion of Cunningham Marsh that is protected by a California Department of Fish and Game easement. It is also proximate to another conservation easement held by the District over the Nahmens property which protects both agricultural and natural resources. The purchase price of the easement is \$387,000.

This represents the first affirmative agricultural easement purchased by the District and the first of its kind in the County. This type of easement—used only a few times in the state, but pioneered and widely deployed on the East Coast—protects quality farmland and continued agricultural protection in perpetuity, and maintains permanent affordability of the land, all of which meet critical needs of farmers. In total, the District has protected 33,000 acres for agricultural use—nearly half of all the land protected by the District since its creation by Sonoma County voters in 1990.

“This acquisition will be a catalyst for other farmland protection projects in the County and throughout the state,” said Maria Cipriani, Assistant General Manager for the District. “We are hopeful that by adding this conservation tool, we can keep our farmlands in agricultural production.”

“This project provides hope, in concrete form, for the future of family owned and operated farms in Sonoma County,” said property buyer John Guardino. “This and similar projects will encourage farming in Sonoma County.”

About the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District permanently protects the diverse agricultural, natural resource and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations. Since 1990, the District has protected 164 properties totaling 75,373 acres. Agricultural and open space lands have been protected through a 1/4-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1990 and reauthorized in 2006. For more information, please visit www.sonomaopenspace.org

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