



**AG +
OPEN
SPACE**
SONOMA COUNTY

LAND FOR LIFE

Farmland for All program Buy-Protect-Sell pilot

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SETUP & LOGISTICS



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AGENDA

- Background and stakeholder input
- Farmland for All program
- Buy-Protect-Sell pilot overview
- Application stage 1

Vital Lands Initiative

- *Protect lands that support **diverse, sustainable, and productive agriculture**.*
- *Create a **balanced portfolio** of protected lands that represents the diverse types of agriculture in Sonoma County.*
- ***Support access to land** for farmers and ranchers.*

Ag community input

- Land access programming shaped by input from farmers, ranchers, ag advocates
- **Land Access for Limited Resource Farmers study**: interviews, advisory group
- Land access, land tenure some of biggest barriers to farmers' and ranchers' success
- Strong desire for Ag + Open Space to work in this area
- No single solution; recommendations include **buy-protect-sell**, easement "enhancements" like **affirmative agricultural covenants**

FARMLAND FOR ALL | Overview

- Will add to our existing ag land conservation work
- Support increased land access for producers
- A variety of tools, resources, and processes
- Pilot of “Buy-Protect-Sell” strategy is the first tool we are developing
- Pilot will protect a smaller agricultural property



FARMLAND FOR ALL | Program goals



- **Prevent conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses** through tools such as conservation easements and covenants
- **Preserve land's agricultural conservation values** by supporting responsible stewardship via stable land tenure and best management practices.
- **Increase access to agricultural land for agricultural producers by reducing the price of agricultural land** via conservation easements and easement enhancements.
- **Increase access to agricultural land for agricultural producers by proactively connecting producers** with access opportunities.
- **Enhance equitable access to agricultural land**, and expand conservation programs to racially and culturally diverse communities.
- **Support local food security** by ensuring that land remains in productive agricultural use.

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BUY-PROTECT-SELL | Pilot summary

- Piloting with 1 property in coming year (2025)
- Learn, improve, launch permanent program
- Steps may be in different order and/or overlap
 - Stage 1 application: identify **potential buyer pool**
 - Identify high-priority **agricultural property**
 - **Purchase** property
 - **Design permanent protections** for property
 - Stage 2 application: **proposals** to select buyer for **specific property**
 - **Sell property**, subject to conservation easement and appropriate enhancements
 - **Monitor property** in perpetuity



BUY-PROTECT-SELL | Property criteria



Property must meet all required criteria, and also a certain number of preferred criteria.

Potential applicant input → refine **property selection**.

Required criteria

- **Willing seller**, clear title, legal right of access
- **Zoning**: LIA, LEA, DA, AR
- Special species/habitats would not be harmed by ag operation
- **Resilient** to climate conditions (flooding, saltwater intrusion)
- **Soils and water access sufficient** for productive agriculture (expert input)

Preferred criteria

- High **risk of conversion** out of ag use
- **5-50 acres** production area
- Near **market opportunities** (15 min), other agricultural operations
- Potential for **community benefits**
- Topography: **flat**/minor hills
- **High quality soils**
- **Infrastructure** present
- **Residence** and/or ag worker housing
- **Utilities** available
- Protection supports **additional conservation goals**

BUY-PROTECT-SELL | Conservation easement



- **Binding agreement** between landowner, Ag + Open Space
- **Permanently limits uses** of the land to **protect agricultural, scenic, natural, open space conservation values**
- Subsequent owners bound – **“perpetuity”**
- **Restrictions include:**
 - Limits development (buildings, roads)
 - Limits alteration of natural features/habitat
 - Prohibits subdivision
- Some activities require **advance approval**
- Ag + Open Space will tailor conservation easement to **fit specific property**
- **Reduces appraised value** (amount unknown)



BUY-PROTECT-SELL | Covenants

Conservation easements = *may not do*

Affirmative covenants = *must do*

Agricultural conservation covenant

- Ensure continued ag use; maintain flexibility
- Minimum ag use: 75% of production area
- May be achieved through leasing; AOS may find tenant if not achieved
- Exceptions for soil health, hardship deferrals
- Crop type restriction, ex: limit area of non-food crops

Affordability covenant

- Support equitable land access by capping max price of future sales
- Requirements for future buyers



BUY-PROTECT-SELL | Buyer selection process

Goal: Long-term owner; potential for successful farm operation; vision for property aligns with program goals.

Stage 1: Initial application

- Assessment of required experience and qualifications
→ pool of potential buyers

Stage 2: Selection of buyer for specific property

- Assess qualifications, vision, readiness, other criteria
 - Farm business proposal
 - Interview(s)
 - If multiple strong candidates identified, final selection via lottery

Assessment: Buyer Assessment Panel of Ag + Open Space staff and relevant experts.



STAGE 1 | Eligibility and priority buyers



Priority buyers

- Aiming to support **equitable land access**
- Harder for limited resource farmers, **historically excluded** communities
- **Stage 2 will consider factors including:**
 - First-time landowner
 - What needs led applicant to apply
- **Stage 2 will prioritize proposals offering community benefits**
 - Ex: fresh food for local communities, outreach and education

Eligibility (*questions 1-3*)

- Any entity **legally qualified to hold land**
 - Individual/sole proprietorship
 - Corporation
 - Partnership
 - Non-profit
 - Tribal entity
 - Government entity
 - Other types of entity
- **If not individual, can secure resolution or letter authorizing application**
- **If not individual, can provide bylaws, operating agreements, other governance documents as requested**

STAGE 1 | Goals for participation



4. *Please share why you are interested in participating in the buy-protect-sell program.*
 5. *Please briefly share the main purposes for which you expect to use a property purchased through the buy-protect-sell program (for example mixed vegetable production, orchard, meat goat grazing, ag education for youth or adults, etc.).*
- **Seeks to understand whether your operation would be likely to advance the Farmland for All program goals**
 - **Answers should clearly and concisely state what you plan to do if selected**
 - **Likely to advance at least one goal → accepted into potential buyer pool**
 - **Likely to not advance, or to undermine, goals → not accepted**

STAGE 1 | Experience and qualifications



6. *Please describe your farming or ranching experience, education, and/or qualifications.*
7. *Please describe your business-related experience, education, and/or qualifications.*
8. *If you have other work and/or life experience, education, or qualifications that will contribute to your ability to successfully operate a farm or ranch but that are not covered above, please share them here.*

- **Seeks to understand whether you will be able to operate successfully long-term**
- **This section is like your resume**
- **For each experience, make clear:**
 - Duration of the experience
 - Context of the experience (ex: home-scale vs commercial scale farm?)
 - Your level of decision-making responsibility at this experience
- **Assessment considers combined total of agricultural + business experience**

STAGE 1 | Financial plan, resources, demographics



- These sections seek to understand the **makeup** of the applicant pool and their **needs**
- Answer as honestly and accurately as possible; these questions will not be used for decision-making
- Demographic information helps us understand **who we are reaching and who we are not reaching**. Please answer whichever questions you are comfortable answering. You may decline to answer any question.



NEXT STEPS

- Send your email address to “Ag + Open Space Tech” in the Zoom chat or send an email to BPS@sonoma-county.org to **receive updates on the pilot**
- Recording posted in approx. 1 week
- **Financial resource fair** in January or February
- Updates and resources will be posted at SonomaOpenSpace.org/BPS as they become available





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Thank you!

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- [Farmland For All webpage](#)
- [Buy-Protect-Sell webpage](#)
- [Program overview, English](#)
- [Application PDF, English](#)
- [Assessment matrix, English](#)
- [Program overview, Español](#)
- [Application PDF, Español](#)
- [Assessment matrix, Español](#)