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Media Contacts:

Amy Ricard | SCAPOSD
amy.ricard@sonoma-county.org
707/565.7261

Larelle Burkham-Greydanus | CA Dept. of Conservation
Larelle.Burkham-Greydanus@conservation.ca.gov
916/322.1831

Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District Wins \$300,000 Grant to Fight Climate Change Through Farmland Conservation

Program aims to reduce emissions, urban sprawl through protection of agricultural land

SANTA ROSA, CA (August 20, 2015) – The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (District) recently received a hard-won \$300,000 grant as part of a statewide Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program towards the acquisition of a conservation easement over Glenn Ranch – a 230-acre cattle ranch in southwest Petaluma. The grant came from the California Strategic Growth Council using the California Climate Investments proceeds from the State’s cap-and-trade auctions with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

“The pursuit of this grant is yet another example of the District seeking outside sources of funding to stretch taxpayer dollars, which results in more agricultural land conserved forever in Sonoma County,” said District General Manager, Bill Keene. “The receipt of this grant is also reflective of the District’s work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through conservation of agricultural and natural open space lands.”

New grant program takes innovative approach to reducing carbon emissions

The SALC Program – which aims to reduce carbon emissions and protect agricultural land from sprawl development – is a new grant program from the Strategic Growth Council's Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program (AHSC), which provides grants and loans to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by supporting more compact, infill development patterns; encouraging active transportation and transit usage; and protecting agricultural land from sprawl development.

While the Strategic Growth Council ultimately approved \$121.9 million in grants and loans to 28 different organizations, only \$4.6 million from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) was allocated for agricultural conservation easements. In fact, the District was one of only seven organizations to receive funding from that allocation. Even so, this \$4.6 million investment in protecting California agricultural lands will bring over 14,000 acres under permanent protection, keeping important farmland in production while helping to manage growth within distinct boundaries.

The extremely competitive program is administered by the State Department of Conservation and provides funding to leverage the protection of strategically-located, highly-productive, and critically-threatened agricultural land via permanent agricultural conservation easements. The goal of the program is to prevent urban sprawl and to avoid increases in greenhouse gas emissions associated with converting farmland to development. The grant is funded by California’s Climate Auction Revenues generated through the implementation of AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act.

These grants and loans help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by supporting more compact, infill development patterns; encouraging active transportation and transit usage; and protecting agricultural land from sprawl development. This year's recommended projects leverage nearly six to one in matching funds and will reduce an estimated 723,286 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions – the equivalent to taking 140,483 cars off the road for one year.

In a press release from the Strategic Growth Council, California Department of Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross said this: "This slate of grants recognizes the important role of California's farmers and ranchers as partners in our state's efforts to adapt to climate change and its effects, including drought. Preserving our agricultural lands for future generations is an important step toward making our communities more sustainable."

Glenn Ranch a perfect candidate for grant funding

Lori and Mark Glenn's ranch in Petaluma is perfectly situated to take advantage of this competitive grant opportunity. The couple currently leases their property for grazing beef cattle and intend to keep the property in agricultural production. Their parcel is surrounded by other ranches and dairies, rural residences, and Helen Putnam Regional Park; so protecting this critical piece of land prevents sprawl from the city's urbanized center and helps to maintain a contiguous stretch of open space land to sequester carbon and reduce further emissions.

Protecting this property also contributes to a vibrant local economy and helps to maintain the rich, agricultural character of our region. Ranching has been integral to Sonoma County's way of life and economy for generations. In fact, many of the county's farms and ranches are owned and operated by families that have worked the land for generations – over 100 years in some cases. Further, Sonoma County's rangelands account for more than 330,000 acres, or nearly one third of the county's land mass (Sonoma County Crop Report 2013). In addition, this property provides a scenic hillside for residents living in and around Petaluma. Keeping the land as open space protects that viewshed in perpetuity.

About the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & 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 more than 106,000 acres. Agricultural and open space lands have been protected through a quarter-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1990 and reauthorized in 2006. For more information, please visit www.sonomaopenspace.org.

About the Strategic Growth Council

The Strategic Growth Council (SGC) was created in 2008 by Senate Bill 732 (Steinberg). The SGC brings together agencies and departments within the Business, Consumer Services and Housing; Transportation; Natural Resources; Health and Human Services; Food and Agriculture; and Environmental Protection Agencies, with the Governor's Office of Planning and Research and three public members to coordinate activities that support sustainable communities emphasizing strong economies, social equity and environmental stewardship. More information can be found at www.sgc.ca.gov.

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