

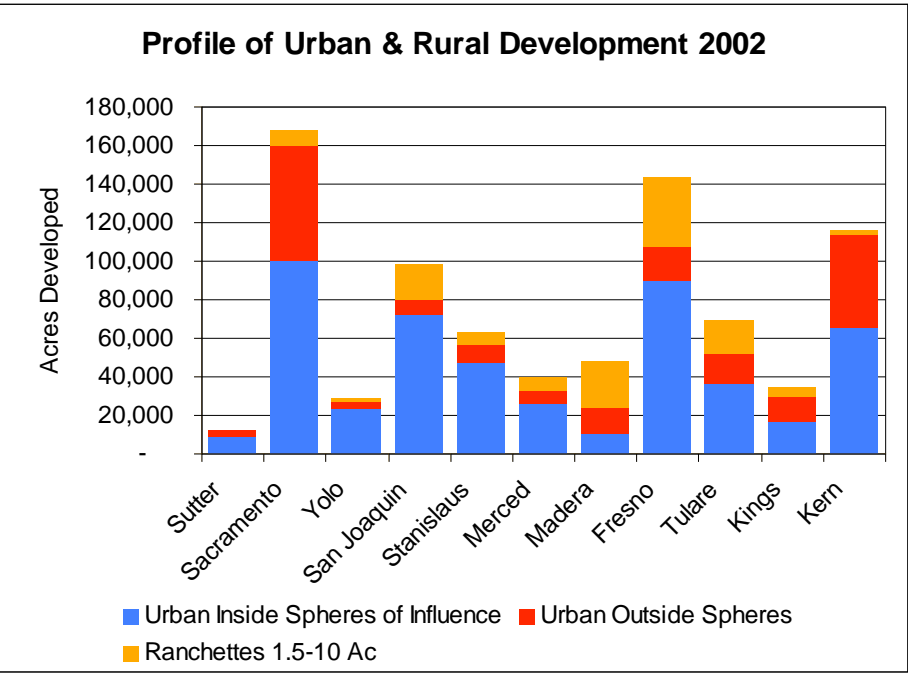
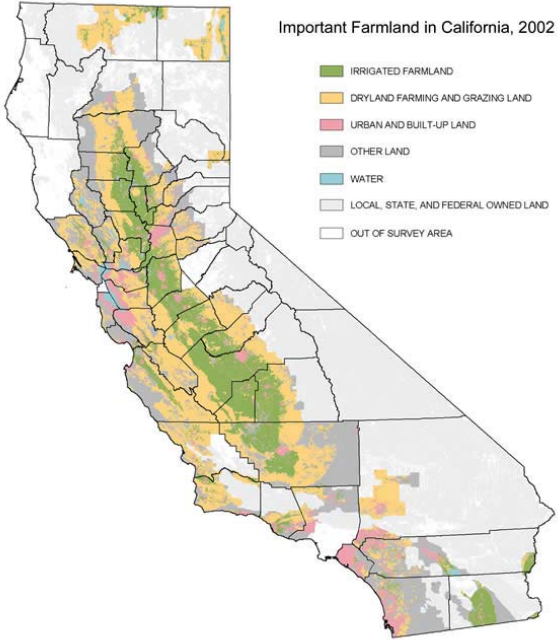
The Future is Now: Central Valley Farmland at the Tipping Point?

American Farmland Trust has just completed an exhaustive study of what is happening to Central Valley farmland and why. The report, entitled *The Future Is Now: Central Valley Farmland at The Tipping Point?* is available only on the Internet at www.farmland.org. This pamphlet summarizes its major findings and highlights the features that make it an invaluable source of information for policy makers, growers and citizens.

The Future Is Now covers 11 counties, from Sutter in the north to Kern in the south, and looks at changes during the period from 1990 to 2000 (when the most comprehensive data on farmland are available).

Development is rapidly sprawling over the land.

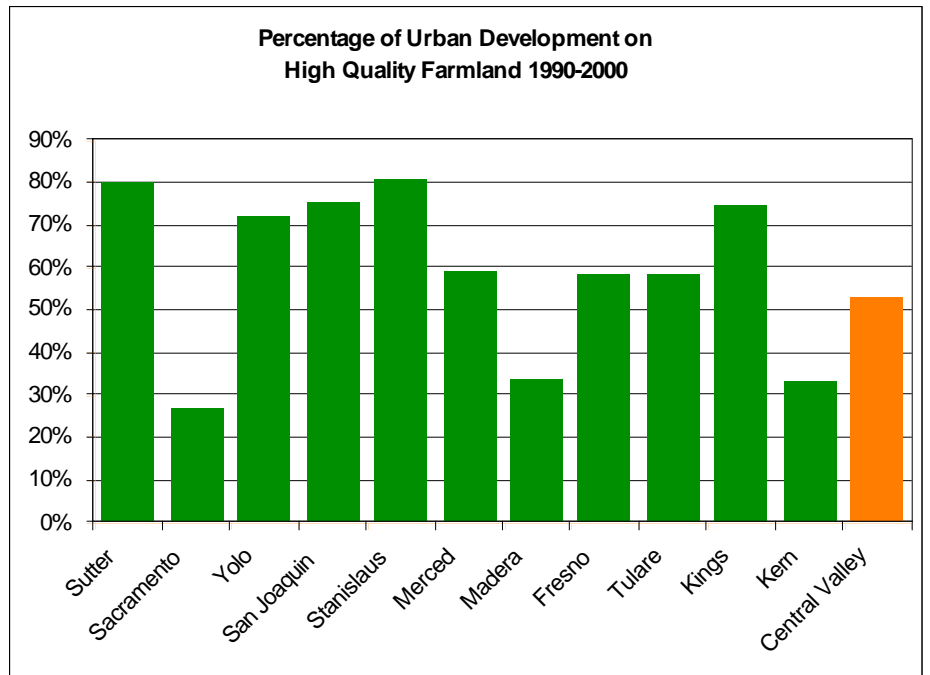
Over 97,000 acres of farmland were urbanized during the 1990s, a 17% increase in just a decade. Another 27,000 acres were developed between 2000 and 2002. This brought the total urban area of the Valley to about 696,000 acres. Of this, about 202,000 acres of developed land (26%) were outside city spheres of influence. Another 127,000 acres of land are developed as “ranchettes,” rural residences on lots ranging from 1.5 to 10 acres. Thus, 40% of all development in the Valley now sprawls beyond the areas where development is supposed to be located in order to promote orderly growth, protect agriculture and keep public service costs and taxes low.



The “edges” of Central Valley cities just keep moving outward... Will it ever stop?

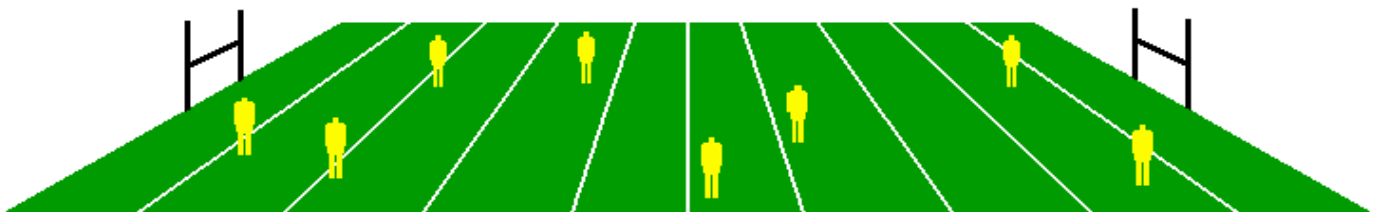
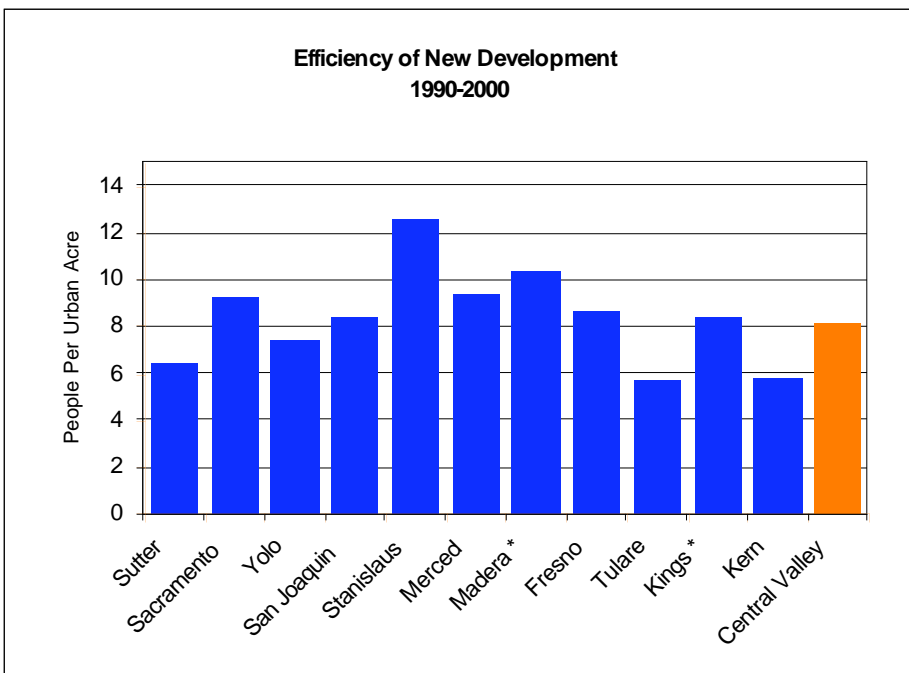
The most productive farmland is being developed the fastest.

In 5 counties, more than 70% of all urban development occurred on prime, unique or statewide important farmland. On average, 53% of all the land urbanized in the Valley during the 1990s met this test of high productivity. In contrast, only 40% of all the private land in the region meets the test. A disproportionate share of development is consuming the best farmland mainly because most cities in the Valley are located in the midst of this land along the Highway 99 corridor.



Farmland is being developed very inefficiently.

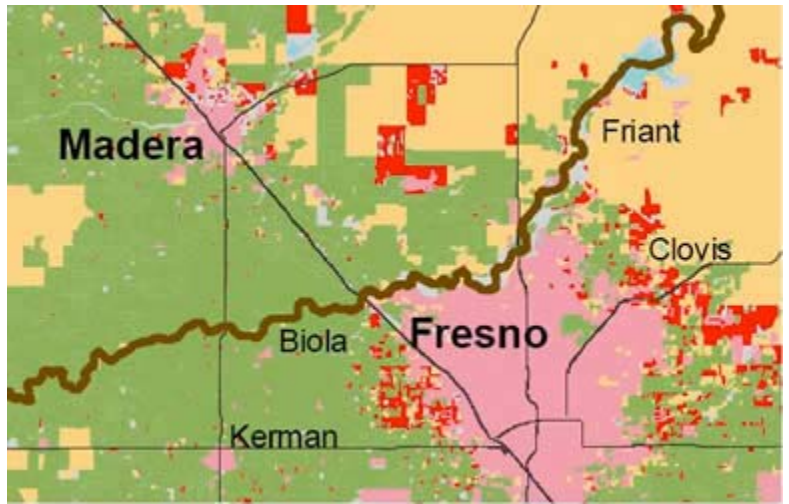
New urban development in the 1990s consumed an acre of land for every 8 new residents – an astonishingly low number considering the high quality of the land that was paved. Increasing the efficiency of development is the single most important thing that can – and must – be done to save a meaningful amount of the Central Valley’s farmland.



Imagine only 8 people scattered over a football field. That's how wastefully sprawl is consuming Central Valley farmland.

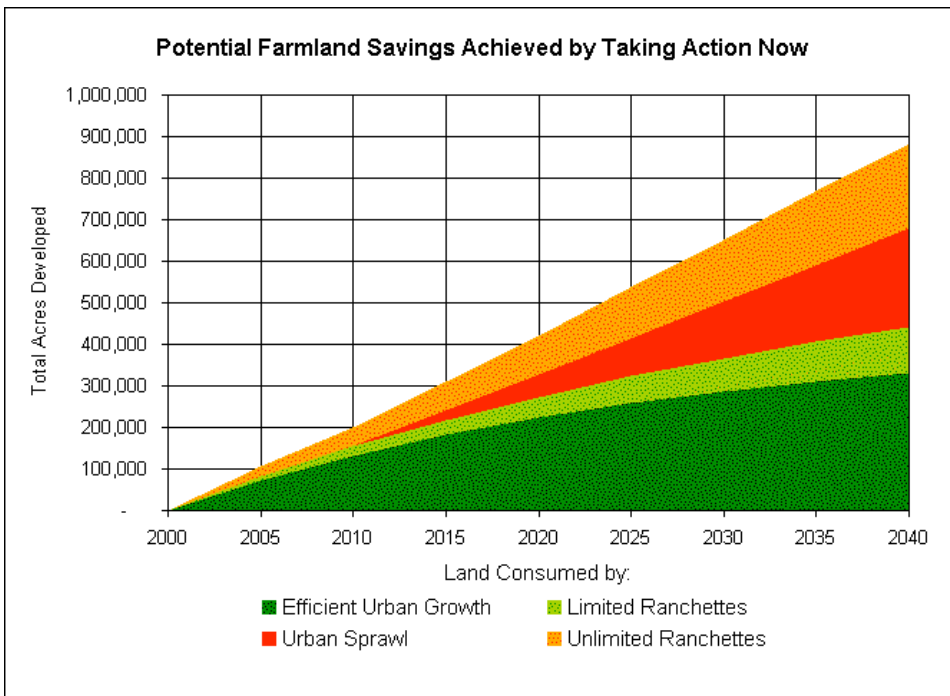
“Ranchettes” occupy one-third as much land as all urban uses combined.

The biggest immediate threat to agriculture in the Valley could be widely scattered, large-lot rural residences. They consume a huge amount of farmland *per capita*, pose the risk of physical and legal conflicts with working farms and ranches, and are driving the price of farmland higher than what farmers can afford. Hundreds of thousands of acres in the Valley are now zoned to permit residences on parcels of farmland 20 acres or smaller.



Red Tide – “Ranchettes” from 1½ to 10 acres (Source: FMMP)

Another 880,000 acres of farmland are at risk unless development patterns change soon.



The continuation of present trends will more than double the developed area of the Central Valley by 2040. Agricultural production could be cut by \$800 million a year. But if action is taken soon to improve the efficiency of urban development, and to curb “ranchettes,” a half million acres of farmland can be saved without dramatically changing the lifestyle identified with the California Dream. Delaying action just a decade, however, could make it impossible to save a significant amount of farmland.

Why is this happening? The core problem is that local government plans are well intentioned, but are simply not being carried out to save farmland.

The general plans of Valley cities and counties all promise to guide development away from the best farmland, to encourage efficiency land development and to curb rural “ranchette” sprawl. But the evidence shows that few communities are actually accomplishing any of these goals. There are many reasons this is occurring, but it all boils down to a lack of the political will – by the whole community – to say “no” to wasteful, sprawling development.





The Future Is Now: Central Valley Farmland at The Tipping Point? is an interactive Web site that features comprehensive county-by-county data tables, graphs, detailed maps of urban and rural development, analysis of local general land use plans, ideas for changing public policy to save farmland – as well as to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution – and direct links to the local officials and organizations that make or influence decisions about land use. The Web site even includes a feature that allows you to decide which farmland preservation strategies are most effective and to *rank the Valley's counties* based on their performance at implementing those strategies.

Most of all, the report is a wake up call. The Central Valley is a truly unique resource. It is one of only five regions on Earth – and the most significant at that – with a Mediterranean climate ideally suited for growing fruits, nuts and vegetables. It contains only about 6 million acres of irrigated cropland and produces \$13 billion worth of food products annually. Future generations will judge us harshly, if we allow this precious land to be paved over.

Some say, not to worry. There is plenty of land left in the Central Valley. That's what they once said about greater Los Angeles – until 1960, the leading agricultural producer in the United States – and about another exceptionally fertile place called the "Valley of Heart's Delight," now known as Silicon Valley.



But there are no more valleys left in California. The future is now. Join AFT in its quest to save the invaluable farmland of the Central Valley.

Keep up to date on the latest trends in farmland preservation in California and around the nation by visiting AFT's Web site at www.farmland.org.

American Farmland Trust is a national, nonprofit conservation organization that works to protect the best farmland, helps communities plan for the future of agriculture and partners with farmers to improve environmental quality.



Edward Thompson, Jr.
California Director
Box 74040
Davis, CA 95617
530-753-1073
ethompson@farmland.org

Research for *The Future Is Now* was generously funded by: The Surdna Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District, Wells Fargo Bank and members of American Farmland Trust. Data and maps were provided by the Farmland Mapping & Monitoring Program, Division of Land Resource Protection, California Department of Conservation.