



MENDOCINO COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE

# NEWS RELEASE

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TO: MENDOCINO COUNTY NEWS MEDIA

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## **Mendocino County Sees State Budget Proposal as Threat to Farmland Preservation**

**Ukiah, California...June 21, 2007**

Governor Schwarzenegger's proposal to eliminate reimbursements to California Counties for participation in the Williamson Act could have significant lasting impacts on the ongoing efforts to preserve farmland and open space in Mendocino.

In his May budget proposal, the Governor recommended eliminating \$39 million that the State provides to local governments participating in the highly successful conservation program. For Mendocino County, this would mean a loss of approximately \$600,000 in revenues in the next fiscal year.

"The Williamson Act has proven to be one of the most significant conservation programs in state history," said Chief Executive Officer Al Beltrami. "To eliminate a component of the program, which would make it fiscally impossible for many counties to continue participation, is not sound public policy."

The Act calls for a voluntary contract between a property owner and local government. In return for agreeing not to develop the land for a minimum of 10 years, the property owner receives a tax break. The State then reimburses participating local governments with a portion of the property tax revenue they would receive if the land was not part of the program.

Since its inception in mid-1960s, the Williamson Act has been highly successful. More than 16.5 million acres of farm and ranch land, including nearly 6 million acres of California's prime farmland, are enrolled in this program. In Mendocino County there are 487,463 acres currently enrolled in the Williamson Act, 34,550 of this is prime farmland.

Mendocino County is proud to be part of the Williamson Act program. "Farmland preservation and open space conservation, though, should be a statewide priority, not just a local priority," said CEO Beltrami. "We need to ensure that the Williamson Act is not altered. If the State removes its fiscal responsibility to the program, it will be turning its back on 40 years of environmental and agricultural protection."

While the \$39 million in subventions is a critical funding component for local government, it only amounts to a mere .036 of 1 percent of the proposed state budget.

"With flat property tax revenues, Mendocino is not in a position to backfill the revenue loss if the Williamson Act program is altered. This would necessitate cuts in other program areas, such as public safety or mental health," said CEO Beltrami. "These are programs that are vital to our residents; we do not want to be put into a position of 'either/or' by the state."

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