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Statement of American Farmland Trust  
On Regional Targets Advisory Committee Report  
to the  
California Air Resource Board  
November 19, 2009

American Farmland Trust is a national nonprofit agricultural conservation organization that has been active in California since 1983. Our goals are to preserve the best land for farming and to increase the environmental benefits of agriculture so that it contributes as much as possible to the well-being of communities and society.

We would like to highlight the RTAC recommendation that the co-benefits of greenhouse gas reducing land use and transportation strategies – especially farmland conservation – be quantified and considered as part of the sustainable communities planning process.

Reducing the climate impact of land use and transportation patterns will almost certainly require that development become more efficient in terms of the acreage consumed *per capita*. This is the principal strategy for conserving farmland in a state where most cities are located in the midst of prime farmland – or what was prime farmland – and where their population continues to expand.

The co-benefits of saving farmland include its carbon sequestration capacity – especially compared with the alternative of rooftops and pavement – and, of course, its contribution to the agricultural economy. Though, I hasten to add that in places like the San Joaquin Valley, where agriculture is the main engine of the economy, its economic contribution might properly be considered the benefit, not merely a co-benefit, of planning that conserves farmland.

In the San Joaquin Valley today, development is consuming an acre of land for every 8 new residents. Envision two four-person touch football teams playing on the gridiron in the Rose Bowl, and you begin to get an idea of how inefficient that is. Development in Southern California is about twice as efficient, and in the Bay Area and here in the Sacramento region, it's almost three times as efficient.

Modeling done for the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint showed a clear correlation between more efficient development, greenhouse gas reduction and farmland conservation. (The table below shows the expected outcomes of three different planning scenarios, the second of which was adopted by the Valley's county MPOs.) A fairly aggressive "smart growth" strategy, in which residential densities, for example, were increased from 4 to 10 units per acre, was estimated to cut greenhouse gases by 20 percent while reducing farmland conversion by more than 50 percent. Our estimate is that this would save the Valley's agricultural economy more than \$2 billion a year, when the standard multiplier is applied to annual crop and livestock production.

Regrettably, there do not seem to be good data on the climate impacts of turning an acre of farm or ranch land into an acre of houses or shopping malls – or, conversely, keeping the land in agriculture. Research on this question is something AFT believes would contribute to a better understanding of the co-benefit of saving farmland, and thus result in better sustainable community strategies.

California agriculture has as much at stake in climate change as any sector of the state's economy. Its value to the state, the nation and the world as a strategy food resource is inestimable. And its economic viability depends significantly on maintaining a land base that is versatile and resilient. American Farmland Trust is encouraged that solutions to climate change may help conserve the land on which agriculture depends and we encourage the Air Resource Board to carefully consider how changes in land use and transportation patterns that will reduce greenhouse gases can also help save the land that feeds us.

Respectfully,

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Comparison of the Three Future Growth Scenarios  
Considered by San Joaquin Valley Blueprint

	Status Quo	County Preferences	Smart Growth
Average Residential Housing Density (Dwellings/Acre)	4.3	6.8	10.0
Low-Density Housing as Percent of All Residential Development in Medium-Size Cities	80%	60%	40%
Total Land Developed (Acres)	533,000	354,000	268,000
Farmland Lost	327,000	209,000	153,000
Environmentally Sensitive Land Impacted	224,000	139,000	117,000
Energy Consumption (Billion Residential KWH/Year)	14.8	13.8	12.0
Vehicle Miles Traveled (Million/Year)	240	233	226
Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Million Tons/Day)	12.1	11.4	9.7