

## Put an agriculture element in plan

Posted: Friday, March 13, 2009 10:36 AM CDT, calaverasenterprise.com

---

I am writing in support of the inclusion of an agriculture and forestry element in the current update of the Calaveras County General Plan.

The 2007 Report of Agriculture for Calaveras County confirms \$20,313,900 in agricultural production. The economic multipliers of agriculture and forestry have long been established. The Public Review Draft Baseline Report, 2008, states, "Agriculture and forestry industries are an important economic sector in Calaveras County, providing multiple values that include jobs and revenues; locally grown food products; support for other industries such as tourism; community identity and legacy; aesthetics including beauty of the landscape and open space; biological, including species habitat; and hydrologic (watersheds and groundwater recharge areas) (p. 12-56)."

Calaveras County has a total area of 1,037 square miles or about 664,500 acres. In our county, as the staff report for a currently proposed project notes, "Agriculture dominates the landscape, especially in the lower elevations, with nearly three-quarters of the county's land devoted to farmland, rangeland, agricultural preserve, and irrigated pasture (2004-114, p. 22)." Given the General Plan is the blueprint for land use into the next 20 years, it only seems logical to have an element that addresses three-quarters of the County's land.

The current draft agriculture and forestry element contains various suggestions for preservation of agricultural land, including conservation easements, which have been attacked on the basis of designating land use in perpetuity and limiting private property rights. Conservation easements are a landowner's choice. Development rights are one of many rights associated with property that may be sold (as typically happens when a conservation easement is placed on property). Urbanization of the landscape is also done, conceptually, in perpetuity, because it is not done with the intent of removing it.

A misunderstanding of conservation easements should not be part of the basis for excluding an agriculture and forestry element from the General Plan update. A separate element will provide the much needed attention these vital industries deserve.

**Muriel Zeller**  
*Valley Springs*