



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 27, 2015

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**County of Santa Clara Awarded Grant to
Preserve At-Risk Farmland in South County for Climate Benefit**
*County to Partner with Open Space Authority to Develop Sustainable Ag Policy
Framework*

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF.-- Extreme drought, increased risk of wildfires and flooding and other indicators of a changing climate are prompting planners, scientists and policy makers across the region and state to look at common sense strategies and investments that can mitigate future greenhouse gas emissions and increase resiliency to climate change effects.

On June 30, 2015, the County of Santa Clara and the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority were awarded a competitive grant from the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, a program of the California Strategic Growth Council. The \$100,000 grant award will support development of a *Sustainable Agricultural Policy Framework for Southern Santa Clara County (Framework)*. The *Framework* will focus on the connection between reducing effects of climate change and limiting conversion of farmland to development, thereby reducing sprawl and the resulting carbon emissions. The grant is funded by California's Climate Auction Revenues generated through the implementation of AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act.

"Projects such as this provide an opportunity for everyone with a stake in the long term viability of the agricultural economy of Santa Clara County to chart a course for our collective future," said Kirk Girard, Director of the County's Department of Planning and Development.

Recent studies show that urban and suburban landscapes generate significantly more greenhouse gas emissions than farmland and that healthy and resilient agricultural landscapes can buffer some of the negative effects of climate change on nearby communities. Natural and agricultural landscapes also provide a host of environmental benefits such as carbon storage, water retention, flood protection, local food production, habitat and biodiversity.

"If agriculture is to survive in South County, an innovative regional framework is needed to demonstrate that conserving farmland from development is a critically important climate change strategy," said Andrea Mackenzie, General Manager of the Open Space Authority. "The time is now to align plans, programs, policies and investment affecting undeveloped agricultural lands to sustain the Valley's natural environment, support the local agricultural economy, and increase climate resiliency and adaptation in Silicon Valley."

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Up to the 1960s, Santa Clara County was among the most productive farming areas of the country and known as the "Valley of Heart's Delight." Post WWII population growth and economic development transformed Santa Clara County into "Silicon Valley." More recently, amidst the growth spurred by the high tech industry and population increases during the last two decades, farmland has declined by 45% and just over 27,000 acres remain, approximately half of which are at risk of development. Santa Clara County is the fastest growing county in California with projected growth of 35%, or 650,000 people, by 2035. The farmlands in Coyote Valley, in and south of San Jose, and the areas around Morgan Hill and Gilroy are at the greatest risk from development pressure.

The *Sustainable Agricultural Policy Framework for South Santa Clara County* will be the first attempt in Santa Clara County to combine agricultural conservation with greenhouse gas emission reduction. The *Framework* will integrate existing and draft local land use policies, plans and ordinances, including:

- 1) *Plan Bay Area*, a regional strategy focused on carbon footprint reduction through smart growth – aligned with the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008
- 2) City of San Jose General Plan, *Envision 2040*
- 3) Santa Clara County *General Plan*
- 4) Santa Clara County's Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones Ordinance
- 5) Economic Benefits of Agriculture, County of Santa Clara Agricultural Commissioner's Office (in production)
- 6) Healthy Lands and Healthy Economies, the Open Space Authority
- 7) The Open Space Authority's *Valley Greenprint*, a 30-year conservation vision outlining strategies and priorities to conserve agricultural land
- 8) General Plans and agricultural preservation programs for the cities of Morgan Hill and Gilroy now in development

A completed *Framework* will integrate mapping, modeling and policies into a comprehensive framework for Southern Santa Clara County that can most efficiently direct growth and protect agricultural land as a climate change mitigation strategy. The research and analysis will include mapping of areas at risk of development and areas of high agricultural productivity, and quantification of reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Santa Clara County will be the lead agency and is partnering with the Open Space Authority to develop the *Framework*. The total budget for the project is \$205,000, including in-kind services and \$100,000 from the Strategic Growth Council grant, \$49,000 from Santa Clara County, \$50,000 from the Open Space Authority and \$5,000 from Cultivate Studio. Panels of technical experts representing the agricultural sector and the municipal government/nonprofit sector will be convened to provide input and review. Dozens of government, nonprofit and industry organizations will serve as advisors and consultants to the project.

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority conserves the natural environment, supports agriculture, and connects people to nature, by protecting open spaces, natural areas, and working farms and ranches for future generations. Since 1993, the Open Space Authority has protected more than 16,000 acres of open space, preserving the region's scenic beauty, protecting water resources and other natural capital, and providing outdoor recreation opportunities for Santa Clara County residents.