

## AFTER THE DEAL GETS DONE...

As the movement to protect farmland matures, many people are realizing that saving land is not enough. In fact, conveying a conservation easement is just the beginning. Stewardship responsibilities are considerable, which is further complicated because productive land has economic and cultural values as well as biological resources to protect. As Bob Berner of the Marin (CA) Agricultural Land Trust says, "Agricultural land is subject to human use, it is being manipulated in some way. The responsibility on the holder of the easement is significantly greater because of that."

### Establishing a Baseline

Stewardship begins when the deal is struck. Current conditions of the resource must be carefully documented through verbal description and photographs, and signed by all parties. Leslie Ratley-Beach, stewardship director of the Vermont Land Trust, says tight oversight of "all the nitty gritty stuff"—discharge of mortgages, accurate deed recording—is critical. Impeccable legal records keep information accessible if needed down the road. But nothing takes the place of good communication.

Ongoing communication with landowners—through newsletters, phone calls and occasional visits—reminds landowners of the restrictions and obligations involved with protected land, as well as the stewardship philosophy, policies and procedures of the land trust. According to Rich Hubbard, Massachusetts' Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture, "conservation easement programs are only as successful as your efforts afterwards are to monitor."

### Monitoring the Land

Most land trusts try to visit their properties annually. New York's Columbia Land Conservancy (CLC) alternates visits on the ground with aerial monitoring. The Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation uses enumerators from the local National Agricultural Statistic Service to visit each farm entering the program at least every 24 months. "They are out seeing the farmers 12 months a year anyway," says Mike McGrath, chief of planning. The enumerators update photographs and submit reports to the Department of Agriculture's computerized monitoring file. "We have great confidence this system will result in rigorous monitoring of these easements without being intrusive," says McGrath. *continued on page 6*

## INNOVATIONS:

### PAYING FARMERS FOR CARBON CREDITS

The same practices that promote soil conservation also may slow global climate change. Agricultural practices to increase moisture retention and fertility in soils, reduce erosion and improve water quality also keep carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is the most common of three "greenhouse gases" that contribute to global warming. Since agriculture is one of very few industries that can sequester more carbon than it produces, farmers may be paid "carbon credits" by industries with high emissions.

Produced primarily by burning fossil fuels, carbon dioxide also is released as organic matter decomposes. Plants absorb carbon through photosynthesis and store it in biomass and soil as organic matter. When soils are disturbed, carbon oxidizes and is released. *continued on page 2*

# LANDWORKS

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# Connection

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who conserve  
the land*

  
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**“This is the greatest opportunity since the dust bowl to advance conservation goals, and farmers can make money doing it!”**

**—Gerald Talbert**

## **Innovations** *continued from page 1*

According to Martin Kleinschmidt, research associate with the Center for Rural Affairs, as much as 50 percent of the carbon originally retained by woodlands and prairie soils has been lost through extensive tilling and bacterial decomposition. Retaining cover crops, practicing no-till planting, reducing use of high-nitrogen fertilizer, and restoring perennial vegetation to marginal farmlands can slow the rate at which carbon dioxide is released and increase the amount of carbon stored in the soil.

This fact has piqued the interest of major producers of greenhouse gases. At the 1997 “Kyoto Protocol” conference, a follow-up to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, participating nations agreed to reduce emissions to below 1990 levels. Although not legally binding until 55 nations ratify the agreement (the United States signed but has not ratified it), some utility companies are looking for ways to offset their environmental impact until they develop cleaner technologies. By purchasing “carbon credits,” these companies may buy time to retool.

Alyden Donnelly is president of GEMCo, a consortium of 10 Canadian natural gas and utility companies accountable for 25 percent of all Canadian greenhouse gases. “Our carbon problem is our customers’ problem,” she says, since the customers will pay for the increased costs to generate cleaner energy. Under Donnelly’s strategy, GEMCo would pay farmers per ton of carbon sequestered per year over a period of up to 15 years if they change farming practices in measurable ways. Farmers would receive between 10 and 35 percent of the payment up front, with the balance paid at the end of the contract if the farmer proves those practices have been followed.

Donnelly is circumspect on prices, but speculates the average farmer in a northern climate could conservatively generate “a good two tons per acre. The potential is more like seven to 10 tons per acre.” She believes the market-clearing price for a ton won’t exceed \$3/ton CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. At this point, the price is between \$1- \$3 (U.S.) per acre. While not a large amount, Donnelly says it could add 20 percent to the farmer’s net cash receipts. “It is an important new commodity that will allow farmers to stay in business while shifting to better (conservation) practices. It is a perfect match,” she says.

Measuring the existing or potential amount of carbon in soils is “baffling most scientists,” says CRA’s Kleinschmidt. Scientists and conservation consultants are exploring ways to document the amount of carbon present in soils today compared to pre-settlement times, and thus the additional amount that could be sequestered through conservation techniques. Soils only hold a limited amount. But according to a 1998 book by Ratan Lal, professor of Soil Sciences at Ohio State University, and John Kimble, Natural Resources Conservation Service scientist in Lincoln, Nebraska, it will take at least 50 years to reach that threshold. Kleinschmidt believes U.S. farmlands could sequester 7 to 10 percent of all U.S. carbon emissions until soil capacities are met.

Crop, climate, soil type and farming practices affect the amount of carbon retained. Gerald Talbert is an independent Maryland-based consultant working with the National Association of Conservation Districts, the NRCS and the Department of Energy on a pilot project called the Iowa Carbon Storage Project. Using a computer model endorsed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, he is establishing a baseline of existing levels of soil carbon for the entire state. County conservation districts determine the number of acres in conservation practices that help sequester carbon. Talbert will incorporate production history, such as when farmers began using commercial fertilizer or converted to no-till techniques. Through this process he hopes to determine how changes in use affect carbon levels.

The Cheriton Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council, also in Iowa, is tracking the conversion of a local coal-burning power plant to a combined fuel of coal and switchgrass. Using biomass will reduce emissions, and growing switchgrass, a native perennial prairie grass, which is mowed like alfalfa, will retain a ground cover while providing a marketable product.

The permit-trading market is still hypothetical. But GEMCo is collaborating with IGF Insurance of Iowa to sign up interested farmers. Alyden Donnelly estimates they will need somewhere between 100 and 400 farmers (80,000 to 280,000 acres) to participate.

While Donnelly's estimate of the potential value is minimal at best, Talbert believes once the Kyoto Protocol is ratified and a regulated market is created, billions of dollars could be transferred from the private sector (automobile manufacturers, energy companies, those industries generating the most CO<sub>2</sub>) to farming and forestry. "It could be worth as much as \$25 to \$30 per ton sequestered, once on the open market," Talbert says.

Kleinschmidt is encouraged that private enterprise is beginning to invest in carbon sinks, especially since these practices will improve food security. "Higher carbon soils can absorb water faster and hold it much longer. The more carbon in the soil, the more bacterial life, the more natural fertilization through recycling plant residue. That alone should be important enough (to adopt these practices)," he says.

Gerald Talbert agrees. "There are so many win-win-wins here! Farmers don't have to buy any more land. They get paid to do the right thing anyway (for the environment), there is a whole new source of funding for agriculture, and a whole new commodity." He concludes, "This is the greatest opportunity since the dust bowl to advance conservation goals, and farmers can make money doing it!" 

*Key proponents, researchers and government representatives will continue the discussion with farmers at a conference in Des Moines, Iowa, August 29-31: "Carbon: Exploring the Benefits to Farmers and Society." [www.cvr.cd.org/carbonl.htm](http://www.cvr.cd.org/carbonl.htm)*

## USING RESOURCES WISELY

### CONNECTING YOUTH TO THE LAND

Near Santa Barbara, California, working farmland is disappearing. But an atypical conservation easement has saved one of the last remaining farms and mandates an educational mission. Nearly engulfed by suburban development, Fairview Garden Farms "provides a place where urban and disconnected youth can begin to understand some of the connections that can be provided by a farm or garden." Owner/operator Michael Abelman says programs are diverse and multifaceted but "the farm is the best part of what we do." He leads "grazing tours" for school children to discover fresh grown food while munching on a just-picked carrot or warm strawberry. "It provides the most important missing link in education today: that is, context."

Ben Holmes would agree. He directs The Farm School in central Massachusetts, where Boston-area school children spend three to five days working on a 100-acre family farm. The purpose is "to make an emotional link for kids to the land, so they understand what resource use and stewardship is about. Our intention is not necessarily to create more future farmers, but to create more kids who have a direct connection to a farm."

The lessons taught at The Farm School are work-based rather than established by a formatted curriculum. Says Holmes, "Farms are our national heritage. As such, a lot of our social and artistic values are embodied in them. To understand a great cow poem, like Donald Hall's, you really have to be out with cows at 6:00 a.m.; then the text becomes alive. The same for physics, science, math. The applications are so numerous and ingrained in action that it brings academics alive." *continued on page 4*

## Paying Farmers For Carbon Credits

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*Food Project youth Chris Reid at The Food Project's Lincoln Farm photo: Greig Cranna*

**“To me, you cannot talk of land preservation without talking about young people. Unless they are inspired to come back into this profession, unless we give them a reason to, unless they can make a living at it, then to talk about land preservation is a joke.”**

**—Michael Abelman**

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The program has helped keep the farm alive as well. Having leased the land for 10 years, The Farm School hopes to purchase it this year. The land has been accepted in the state’s farmland protection program, and a local land trust will pre-acquire the development rights until state funding comes through.

Greg Gale, director of Program Development for The Food Project in Boston, believes “youth are the inheritors of the food system. The more they understand food as an environmental, social, economic and community-building issue, the more they can choose how to get involved in that issue.”

Started in 1991 as a self-funded pilot project of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, The Food Project brings together teens from the greater Boston area to grow and distribute food to local homeless shelters, soup kitchens and food pantries, and in the process develop leadership, communication and job skills. Working together on a 21-acre conservation parcel in the wealthy suburb of Lincoln and on several reclaimed inner-city lots in Roxbury and Dorchester, approximately 100 teens raise 150,000 pounds of organic produce and volunteer collectively 2,500 hours at distribution points.

“We involve young people in highly productive agriculture done on a significant scale,” says Gale. “This is a productive enterprise around which we can serve others, build community and bridge radically different communities of Boston.” Adam Seidel spent several summers with The Food Project. While not interested in agriculture initially, environmental work has taken root. “I’m not positive if I will be a farmer,” he says, “but I will always be a gardener, I’ll always work the land.” He adds that a lot of the lessons he learned were life lessons. “You get back what you put in. You plant seeds, you get back fruit, but it takes a lot of work in between. That was a good lesson for me to learn.”

Through this and similar programs, young people are learning to be organizers as well. The second “Rooted in Community” conference—a uniquely youth-driven event—will be held in San Francisco July 28-30, 2000. Subtitled “Harvesting the Power of Youth,” youth involved in urban agriculture, community gardening and sustainable food systems will lead workshops and panel discussions about their work.

Without a doubt, bringing young people onto the land benefits youth by enlivening lessons in science and literature, and by teaching them the value of their own hard work. But it also helps protect the viability of farmland in the future. In the words of Michael Abelman, “To me, you cannot talk of land preservation without talking about young people. Unless they are inspired to come back into this profession, unless we give them a reason to, unless they can make a living at it, then to talk about land preservation is a joke. You can preserve the land but you won’t have the people to work it.”

Abelman’s ultimate goal is to return a sense of honor to what is often seen as a menial job. “If we are ever to bring young people back into this profession, we must replace the sense of drudgery that this has obtained, and allow them to see it as a complex, sophisticated art that requires a lot of skill, craft and thought.” 

<b>LAY OF THE LAND</b>	
° Farm share of the consumer dollar in 1910	41%
° Farm share of the consumer dollar in 1990	9 %
° Marketing share of the consumer dollar in 1910	44%
° Marketing share of the consumer dollar in 1990	67%
° Input share of the consumer dollar in 1910	15%
° Input share of the consumer dollar in 1990	24%

# POLICY REPORT

## RESTRUCTURING THE VALUE OF FARMS

In a keynote presentation to AFT's annual farmland protection conference in April, Stewart Smith outlined a new way to place value on farms and farming. Now professor of Sustainable Agricultural Policy at the University of Maine, Smith knows agriculture. A potato farmer for 16 years, Smith later worked for the USDA Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service, served as senior economist on the Joint Economic Committee of Congress and was commissioner of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources.

Production is only one component of the agricultural system, says Smith, and a diminishing one. Conversely, the input sector—those industries that manufacture and sell seed, fertilizers, pesticides, machinery and services to farmers—and the marketing sector—those that process, transport, warehouse, wholesale and retail farming products—have grown dramatically. The result is a substantial drop in farming income. Whereas the farming share of the consumer dollar was more than 40 percent in 1910, Smith's research shows it at 9 percent in 1990, and steadily decreasing. The shift of economic activity from farming to non-farming sectors has been devastating to the family farm.

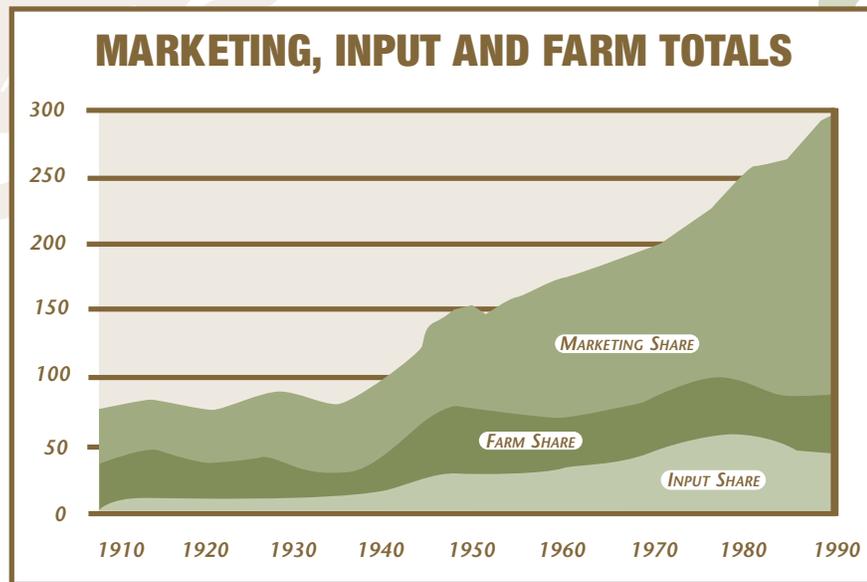
Federal farm policy has exacerbated this trend by stressing commodity production and industrialization over diversification and sustainability. In other words, America's cheap food policy is driving farmers out of business. Smith describes the conventional supply/demand debate that has shaped national farm policy. The "demand expanders"—typically the American Farm Bureau, commodity groups, and many Republican committee members—believe government's primary role should be to assist the demand for commodity production by marketing aggressively and promoting exports to the global market. They would reduce production costs by lowering taxes and regulatory barriers. The "supply managers," on the other hand—such as the National Farmers' Union, National Family Farm Coalition, sustainable agriculture advocates, and some Democratic members—would help family farms by managing commodity supply through set-asides and farmer-owned reserves, and reducing the concentration of production.

The choice between these two positions will continue to shape federal agricultural policy; that in turn determines the number, types and sizes of farms that survive, the environmental quality of farm resources and consequently the viability of rural communities. Expanding demand, says Smith, will mean greater industrialization, fewer full-time farms, less balance between regional production and consumption, and greater long-term instability in the food system. Managing supply might slow these trends, but will not change the basic direction.

Commodity supporters underwrite food production, but ignore other valuable attributes of an agricultural economy. In addition to food, farms provide environmental and sociocultural benefits that we value but don't pay for. Visual landscapes, clean air and water, and healthy ecosystems are some of the attributes farms can provide. Rural communities that are based on an agricultural economy provide additional social and cultural assets. These are currently "free" by-products, or are realized through smaller, alternative venues such as farmers' markets, CSAs, farm stands—places that provide direct links between farmers and consumers, and enable the farmer to retain a greater share of the food dollar. Smith would change the direction of federal farm policy toward a new model that rewards these non market values. *continued on page 8*

**"We have adopted farming practices that have redirected the returns that used to go to farmers to input suppliers and marketers. If we are going to maintain farms and rural communities, we must adopt systems that recapture those revenues for the farmer."**

**—Stewart Smith**



## After the Deal Gets Done... *continued from page 1*

**“Land trusts have focused so much on saving land that the stewardship piece has not been given as much serious thought as it needs. That’s where the integrity of land conservation is: what happens after the deal gets done.”**

**—Marty Zeller**

Some organizations, such as Montana Land Reliance, supplement full-time staff with seasonal resource consultants to conduct these visits. MLR’s part-time land stewards are known to ranchers and often help with management issues, says Operations Manager Lois Delger.

### From Monitoring to Management

“The ultimate end of land conservation is good stewardship of the land; not just keeping development off it, but encouraging good management practices,” Colorado-based consultant Marty Zeller states. He does not recommend including specific management mandates in the easement since it makes the easement cumbersome. Furthermore, since ecological understanding and agricultural technologies are constantly evolving, the easement needs to be flexible over time. So land trusts must generally find other ways to encourage good management.

Rather than mandate conservation practices, CLC’s Judy Anderson says, “We’d rather work with the landowners to understand what good management is about.” Some land trusts offer training workshops or refer landowners to the local Cooperative Extension Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service or other agency to help create a forest management plan, maintain grazing lands, protect water quality or build a farm pond. Montgomery County, Maryland, offers a financial bonus to farmers who implement a conservation management plan within three years. “It gives the landowner a vested interest in maintaining that resource,” says John Zawitowski, director of planning and promotion in the Department of Economic Development.

### When the Land Changes Hands

While the original landowner may fully support the intention of the easement, the same may not be true for subsequent owners. Massachusetts-based attorney Joel Russell believes “responsibilities don’t accrue until later on, when the land changes hands.” Tracking the change in ownership is critical. If the original deed provides the land trust a right of first refusal or an option to purchase at agricultural value, it will be notified when the owner plans to sell. Ideally, realtors or attorneys will inform prospective buyers about the purposes and limitations of the easement before the purchase. But even if the easement is filed with the deed, it may be overlooked or, more frequently, not fully understood.

CLC’s Anderson says she meets with the new owner as soon as possible, preferably before the deal closes. “We walk them around the property and through the easements, to make sure they understand the different zones and resources. It involves a lot of outreach.” Education, she says, is the real brunt of their work. Nevertheless, second generation owners are less likely to be aware of the restrictions, and thus the potential for violations increases as the property turns over.

### Handling Violations

“These (easements) are legal documents,” says Vermont’s Ratley-Beach. “They are not written for most people to understand.” To avoid litigation, VLT trains its staff to actively listen to people, facilitate meetings and mediate or resolve disputes. In most cases, once owners understand the situation, they will correct the violation. While it can lead to litigation, this is rare. In 23 years, the VLT has only had one serious violation that nearly went to trial—not a bad record for 711 easements on 240,767 acres. If there is a clear relationship between the resource identified in the baseline documentation, the language of the legal document, and the monitoring and enforcement of the easement, says Zeller, the land trust is in a strong position.

### Establishing an Endowment

Monitoring and enforcing the conditions of an easement can be costly. As Zeller states, “The ability to enforce the conditions of an easement relates directly to the financial viability of the land trust.” VLT’s Bristow estimates the annual cost of monitoring at \$350-400. For every 100 easements, he says a land trust ideally should have one staff member. To cover the cost of monitoring, an endowment should be obtained when the deal closes. If the landowner can’t afford a cash gift at the time of the original deal, payment may be phased over time. There may be a wealthier neighbor, local citizen or interested group who could donate the money. If owners receive a tax deduction for their donation, they could

## After the Deal Gets Done...

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contribute part of the tax benefit. Or the deed could stipulate the donation be made from proceeds of a sale to a subsequent owner. A limited development plan can create a few lots on less valuable farmland so that one lot or a portion of the proceeds from the sale of lots could be earmarked for the land trust.

Ultimately, says Marin's Bob Berner, "Preserving agricultural land involves more than just preserving the land. Farming is an economic enterprise; it must remain economically viable." This conviction leads Berner to speak out on land use policies and zoning codes that may help or hinder agriculture. It is yet one more dimension of the educational role that many believe is a land trust's greatest responsibility "after the deal is done." 🚧

## GOOD DEALS

### FOOD COOP SAVES FARMLAND

The nation's largest retail food coop, Seattle-based PCC Natural Markets, knows the value of good produce. They also know the value of the land on which it is grown. So when supplier Nash Huber, who farms the largest organic produce operation in western Washington, sounded the alarm about the fast disappearance of farmland in the fertile Dungeness River Valley, PCC decided to do something about it. They established the nonprofit PCC Farmland Fund last September to secure and preserve threatened farmland in Washington State and move it into organic production. Before the fund was six months old, they had their first project.

Jody Aliesan, PCCFF's president and operating officer, learned that wildlife biologist Anita McMillan had received a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for \$900,000 to buy farmland on habitat-rich floodplains in the region. The grant required a one-to-one match with local organizations. "I called her up and said, 'Hey, we can help you!'" says Aliesan. Talks began in January, focusing on a centrally located 100-acre farm that was up for sale. Farmland in lower Dungeness Valley is completely surrounded by residential development; if this key parcel went, it would be hard to save the balance.

McMillan's grant was dedicated to preserving salmon habitat. The plan to farm the land organically is compatible with habitat restoration, says Aliesan; "We wanted to demonstrate that salmon restoration and farming can coexist," she says. But they needed to amend McMillan's grant application to Fish and Wildlife. They put together a memorandum of understanding, a conservation easement and management plan for the land, stipulating that the farming be organic in perpetuity, and folded it into the grant amendment.

Although the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will eventually underwrite half the \$600,000 purchase price, funds will not be released until the amendment is authorized by US FWS. So when another offer was made to purchase the farm, Aliesan had to come up with the full payment to secure the deal. PCCFF had raised \$75,000 in the first two months of existence—5 percent of PCC's October produce sales went to the fund, and more than 100 PCC staff support it through payroll deduction. Members, shoppers and vendors continued to contribute. But could they raise another \$525,000 in time?

Two banks recently had authorized two loans to PCCFF's parent organization, PCC Natural Markets, and PCC gave Aliesan permission to direct those loans toward the land acquisition price. The banks agreed to double their support to PCCFF until such time as US FWS agrees to the amended terms of the grant. As of early July, the Farmland Fund raised \$126,000, and has promises of \$30,000 in low or no-interest loans. Aliesan expects an additional \$8,000 in vendor gifts by the deal's closing date of July 20. She expects to repay the loan within 18 months through additional member, staff and vendor donations.

In the end, WDFW will hold the title to the land, PCC will hold the organic farming conservation easement and will lease the land from WDFW. Nash Huber will sublease the land, at its agricultural value, from PCC. Huber, relieved of the worry of protecting the land, can then turn his energy into structuring his operation. "This is an old, established farm with deep alluvial soil," he says.

"Its layout provides a broad and interesting palette for the farmer to work on." Plans include orchard fruit and nut trees, cane berries and medicinal herbs, as well as row crops.

*continued on page 8*

**"We want to assure the availability of fresh, local, organic produce for our members. When farmland goes, we become vulnerable."**

**—Jody Aliesan**

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## Policy Report *continued from page 5*

A small portion of federal and state programs underwrite certain environmental values provided by farms—programs such as the Conservation Reserve, Wetlands, and Farmland Protection Programs. But the vast majority of federal programs remain devoted to underwriting commodity production and agricultural industrialization, which benefit the largest farms. “The problem lies in the structure of the food and agriculture system, and especially the way we farm. We have adopted farming practices that have redirected the returns that used to go to farmers to input suppliers and marketers. If we are going to maintain farms and rural communities, we must adopt systems that recapture those revenues for the farmer.”

### **Restructuring The Value Of Farms**

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While physical changes in farming are supported by new research, cultural changes can be affected by policy. Smith challenges federal policymakers to follow the lead of local and state programs, and underwrite innovative production technologies that support all agricultural outputs—food, environmental and sociocultural. Such a shift, says Smith, would not require additional funding or a new structure. “We can take the money that now goes to commodity payments and boost substantially the programs that are there, but on a small scale.” So-called “green rewards”—payments for open landscapes, ecosystem maintenance, carbon sequestration (see story, page 2), pollution control, and farmland protection—could be expanded. In this way, federal policy could support the environmental and sociocultural values of farms as well as increase research and development funds for alternative methods. “If family farms are producing what citizens want—that is, healthy communities—then somehow we need to provide a payment for that.” 

## Good Deals *continued from page 7*

Aliesan says it makes sense for PCC to preserve farmland. “We want to assure the availability of fresh, local, organic produce for our members. When farmland goes, we become vulnerable. Our food supply moves farther away and needs to be transported, which increases petroleum use and is less sustainable. It has been heartening to see how people in the valley have responded to this. It has shifted the polls from resignation about farmland loss to hope.” 

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