

VALLEY LAND ALLIANCE

FORMALLY KNOWN AS CENTRAL VALLEY FOOD AND FARMLAND COALITION



Our Mission is to Educate and Build Alliances to protect our uniquely productive California Central Valley farmland.

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

FALL 2007

Website

Valley Land Alliance is up and running. The site is being updated weekly. Check out land use news from across the Valley and nation. You will get up to date meeting announcements. Check it out! <http://www.valleylandalliance.org>

Grant

We are grateful to Merced Foundation which partially funded this newsletter. Thank You.

Survey Says....

According to a public opinion poll conducted by the Valley Land Alliance, 55% of Merced County residents believe that "poorly planned growth" is an "extremely serious" issue facing the County. Growth ranked as the #1 concern of County residents; finishing ahead of Traffic, the Economy, Affordable Housing, Air Quality, Public Schools, and Global Warming.

The same poll showed overwhelming support for a measure that would make developers pay for the costs of infrastructure incurred as the result of housing development. 77% of County residents stated that "any new development should pay the full cost for infrastructure improvements necessary to support the development, including paying for public safety,

schools and roads." At present, fees charged to developers pay for only a fraction of infrastructure improvements.

School districts have been especially hard hit by the pressures of trying to serve

new students while receiving funding inadequate to build new schools and hire new teachers.

Support for strict growth boundaries around the County's cities was also significant, though weaker than support for developer fees. 66% of Atwater residents, 67% of Livingston residents,

and 59% of Merced residents indicated that they would support growth boundaries around their cities.

Though making developers pay is the largest concern of voters in regard to land issues, serious concern also exists about traffic and farmland preservation. 54% of voters believe that increasing traffic is an "extremely important" issue facing our County, and 49%

believe that preserving farmland is "extremely important."

Interestingly, support for the issues and positions of the Valley Land Alliance was strongest among people characterizing

See Poll on p 5



HIGHLIGHTS

- President's Message 2
- VLA in Action 2
- Generation Y 3
- Livingston Protest 3
- For the Record 4
- Editor: Nicole Alvernaz.

Planning out of the Box

Many say they don't like the growth plans for the valley that are being drawn up. However, they don't have any alternatives to offer. Valley Land Alliance (VLA) along with Merced County Farm Bureau and other concerned local groups are holding a meeting to brainstorm some out of



the box planning.

To help initiate ideas VLA is bringing in Holly Hart as a guest speaker. Hart is with Smart Coalition for Kern County, and will share new ideas to help us plan our growth.

The meeting is October 8, 6-8 pm at the Merced City Hall Sam Pipes Room.

Come out, bring your ideas and see if we can discover another way to grow without paving over our food sources.





President Jean Okuye

President's Message

With the end of summer and the many crops in the Central Valley being harvested, this is a good time to reflect and say thank you. Just as our crops need nourishment and care, so does the Valley Land Alliance. We are thankful for all who have supported us making it possible to accomplish what we have. In this newsletter you will find several of the accomplishments we have made in our two years of existence as a nonprofit 501 (c) 3 organization.

You will also find some changes which we believe are beneficial.

First of all, we have

changed our name from Central Valley Food and Farmland Coalition to Valley Land Alliance. How do you like it? We no longer are being confused with several other organizations.

Secondly, we have had Maureen McCorry working with us the past six months. She has jumped right in, supporting our mission by meeting with concerned citizens, state officials, Merced County supervisors and city officials, speaking to groups and writing letters to the newspapers. She has put Valley Land Alliance on the map. We are very fortunate to have such a talented, hard-

working native of Merced who is dedicated in saving our farmland. Although she will no longer be with us as executive director, she will be working with us in other capacities. Check out our website which Ms. McCorry helped develop; valleylandalliance.org.

We are grateful to all who have supported us. As U.S. Rep. Dennis Cardoza said, "We won't see a change unless there is a grassroots movement like in the 60's." Let's be of that movement!
Sincerely,
Jean Okuye



Palo Alto students learn about country life.

Valley Land Alliance in Action

Palo Alto High School students visited the Magnuson Dairy to learn about life in the country. Valley Land Alliance (VLA) was there to educate them about land use in the Central Valley.

Over the last three years about 100 students have participated annually. VLA hopes to develop a sister high school with students from Palo Alto and Livingston.

In other action, VLA weighed in on the several recent land use issues in Merced County. In all cases, the Board of Supervisors approved action to parcel lands zoned A-1 under the general rule exemption to CEQA.

Perhaps the most significant since the RMP raceway was the Board of Supervi-

sors' 3-2 decision to approve a guidance package for the Turlock Golf and Country Club expansion project. This proposal will adversely impact agriculture, water, and transportation in Turlock, Delhi, and Hilmar. Joining forces with the Merced County Farm Bureau, the Merced Alliance for Responsible Growth, local activists from Hilmar and Delhi, the VLA encouraged the Merced Board of Supervisors to reject the Club expansion. Over 550 local Hilmar residents signed a petition requesting their supervisors to oppose this. VLA argued that the proposal to convert 1,563 agriculturally zoned acres into 2,200-3,000 low and very low density housing does not adhere to Merced County's General Plan (GP). Under the current GP, "Conversion of agricul-

tural land into urban uses shall be allowed only *where a clear and immediate need can be demonstrated...*"

On a 3-2 vote, the Board approved the plan ignoring Merced County's status in leading the nation in unaffordable housing, foreclosures, and vacant homes. In approving this package, the county ignored the will of the local MACS, the advice of the County Department of Public Works related to the proposed 165 bypass, and the supervisor who represents this district.

The board sets a dangerous precedent in planning an urban area comprised of 11,000 people into unincorporated county land where local residents are at best divided on this issue.



Generation Y

By Rochell Koch

As we move into the Millennials/Generation Y, which is comprised of young people that were born between 1982 and 2000, we have to come to grips with the fact that we are always in a constant state of change. Our youth will never work as hard as we did physically, and we didn't work as hard as our parents did either. Gone are the days when we had large families to milk the cows, work the fields and make the butter. Not only will we no longer darn socks and patch jeans, we must also face the fact that we need to move into a new way of thinking.

I like to think about how we define this generation. It can be 9-11, the war in Iraq, global warming, Paris in prison, record

levels of obesity, smart cars, flat screen computers and TVs, monkeys that can run electronics via brain waves, stem cell research and youth that can multi-task better than a mom with 3 children.

I also like to think about how we define this generation with the food we eat and where it comes from. We here in California were the last frontier. We had the opportunity to come to a landscape that was open and abundant. We worked the ground, damned the rivers, fished the oceans, flew the skies, skied the mountains, rode the sand dunes, and moved in like there was no tomorrow.

We here in California have had an abundant fiesta. But it seems that the piñata has been

knocked down and the candy is now gone. The air is thick, the prices are up, the heat is on and the land grab is over. We are left with a hangover that we are forced to live with. We have much work to do before we can bring back our party days.

Valley Land Alliance is committed to working hard to protect our local food security and the industry that produces it. We understand that the future is constantly changing and we need to have a hand in how those changes occur, or we will be left with a dying agricultural industry and buying our food from foreign countries.

We need your support to continue our work to protect our local food source.

Valley Land Alliance Wins Blue Medal at Merced County

By Maureen McCorry

Adapting Populist themes from the Wizard of Oz, Golden Valley High School students, Julia Becker and Alyssa Flores— created a Blue Ribbon Informational Booth at the Merced County Fair. Not bad, for a first time entry. The girls cleverly used “the Scarecrow” to present two paths for Merced

County residents to consider when thinking about future growth.

One path, led to business as usual, the “alternative” yellow brick road featured fresh produce from local farmers, which is our national treasure. This display reminded local residents that when we “choose” status

quo growth, we put the best that the Valley has to offer at risk. The VLA booth provided fairgoers with inspiring visuals of “smart growth.”

Julia and Alyssa are seniors and currently serve as “co-presidents of the student action group “SPEAC” at Golden Valley.

“The ‘alternative’ yellow brick road featured fresh produce from local farmers.”

Livingston Citizens Turn out to Protest Draft of General Plan

By Maureen McCorry

Citizens for Intelligent Growth, VLA, and the Farm Bureau sponsored two Town Hall meetings on August 23rd and Sept 6th. More than two hundred residents turned out in Livingston to get informed of the Livingston’s General Plan Update.

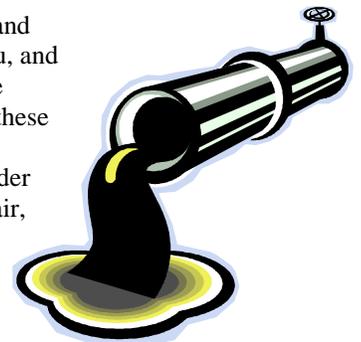
Why the outrage and interest? It started with what most folks consider to be the illegal

placement of a 42 inch sewer line that stretches more than a mile. Neither the county, nor the city, has taken responsibility for why and how this was allowed.

Jim Alvernaz introduced elements of the plan to an attentive audience which included County Supervisor Deidre Kelsey and Livingston Mayor Guralp.

Alvernaz was followed by local land-use and air quality ad-

vocates, Diana Westmoreland Pedrozo of the Farm Bureau, and Melissa Kelly-Ortega of the Asthma Coalition. Both of these women implored locals to change the frame and consider our capacity for water and air, before plunging into future development that cannot be sustained.



For the Record, Proceed With Caution....

“For the latest updates please check the Merced County Web Site at www.co.merced.ca.us/gpu/”

By Maureen McCorry

Merced County had been working on the County’s General Plan update and Valley Land Alliance (VLA) has had a seat at the table. During this important time citizen participation is critical. For the latest updates please check the Merced County Web Site at www.co.merced.ca.us/gpu/. Besides the state mandated elements, why aren’t citizens being exposed to a variety of

choices? How about a “Food Element” that looks at how to maintain/sustain our local food source or a “Social Element” that helps to plan our hospitals and school sites in a coordinated fashion?

We encourage you to get educated, attend our workshops, and demand a process that has an outcome that will ultimately translate into actionable policy in a new General

Plan. How can we protect what makes this region unique and what the first round of workshop participants valued: Agriculture.



Become a member of Valley Land Alliance today! Membership donations are: \$15 Student \$50 Family \$25 Individual \$100 We give you a gift! Checks can be mailed to: Valley Land Alliance P.O. Box 102 Cresey, CA 95312 For more information on how to join go to our website at: <http://www.valleylandalliance.org>

Input Critical: On Blueprints and General Plans

By Maureen McCorry

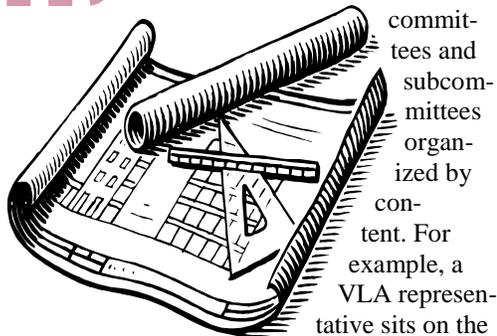
In a nutshell, Governor Schwarzenegger has put his stamp of approval on a process for a regional plan in the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys. As you are well aware, planning is a local responsibility. Therefore, the Blueprint was designed with multiple ways for citizens of all sizes and shapes to take part in this process. For example, each county has representatives who feed into a Regional Advisory Committee. There

are also committees and subcommittees organized by content. For example, a VLA representative sits on the Housing, Land Use and Agriculture work group (yes, in that order). The way in which most folks will participate in the process is through their County “COG” – in our case that is The Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG). At the county level, each county has configured its citizen participation process a bit differently. Merced County happens to be the lead county on this process. The dates are as follows: October 9th, Merced; October 11th, Los Banos; and October 17th, Ballico.

the table and making sure that whatever growth options/alternatives are generated in our Merced County meetings – have an agriculture perspective front and center. We would really like to see lots of folks at these meetings. This will be critical to ensure that Ag is not thrown off the map... (no pun intended). Learn more about the Blueprint process by visiting:

<http://www.sjvalleyblueprint.com/>.

You can also go directly to MCAG at www.mcagov.org for specific dates and locations for the October meetings referenced above; the Blueprint link is the left. The Great Valley Center also has information on the Blueprint at: www.greatvalley.org under column entitled, “Special Projects” -- near the bottom.



Use and Agriculture work

Poll *continued from page 1*

themselves as “Conservative Republicans” as well as those characterizing themselves as “Liberal Democrats.”

People who consider themselves moderates are least likely to support VLA positions on developer responsibility for the costs of growth, urban growth boundaries, and saving farm-

land.

We believe that this is heartening news. The Valley Land Alliance supports the building of a farmer-environmentalist coalition to preserve farmland and the Valley’s quality of life. Farmers are often conservative Republicans, and envi-

ronmentalists are often liberal Democrats, but both groups understand that the health and success of our children requires preserving farmland, not paving it over.



Nicholas Calf Ranch Inspires Golden Valley Seniors

By Julia Becker,
VLA Student Volunteer

When one thinks of a futuristic home, the image of voice activated toasters and the family robot that greets one at the door come to mind. Although this dream is no longer as unthinkable as before, a new home of the future has been erected. My friend, Alyssa, and I recently visited the Nicholas Calf Ranch and were left in a state of awe as to what we saw. Rochelle Koch gave us a brief tour of her home, explaining how important it was to her family to co-exist with the environment. She explained that their wood burning fire place was filtered to reduce carbon emissions, and they compost their everyday garbage. After we absorbed everything possible inside the Koch’s home, Rochelle took us to the side of the house to show us their beautiful solar panels.

Fresh and reflective, the solar panels provided the electricity to run their household and ranch.

We made our way to the office where Rochelle unplugged an electric golf cart and began our tour. As we passed the office, Alyssa and I noticed that there were several bikes propped against the wall. Rochelle said that the workers not only enjoy riding the bikes around the ranch, but fight over them. She showed us the individual crates where they keep the calves, expressing the importance of cleanliness.

Although their ranch is not organic, we learned that organic may not always be best. In order to obtain many organic food items, they may need to be imported sometimes from around the world. It is like importing

corn from South Dakota when we grow it locally. Rochelle gave new light to my opinion on locally grown produce and I found inspiration to support their efforts. It seemed like the Koch’s used only what they needed and tried to give everything a purpose. On the drive back to the office, we viewed the manure compost. The rich compost is outstanding fertilizer and is apparently very precious and in demand. Alyssa and I were stunned by the inner workings of a successful calf ranch and gained a new sense of appreciation for the Koch’s. This house of the future combines with the ranch of the future, and this doesn’t have to be a dream for the future, it can be a present reality.

“Their wood burning fireplace is filtered to reduce carbon emissions, and they compost from their everyday garbage”

Fresh Blood

Valley Land Alliance (VLA) has some new blood working on the website and newsletter.



Ross Avilla

Ross Avilla is the new webmaster for VLA. He is a third generation resident of Stevenson, CA, and is currently pursuing a doc-

torate in Social Psychology at UC Davis. He is the son of VLA board member Robby Avilla, a local business woman devoted to maintaining Central Valley farmland and leader of the Stevinson Citizen’s Group.

Nicole Alvernaz is the new editor of the VLA newsletter. She graduated from Cal Poly with a Bachelors of Science in

Broadcast Journalism and a minor in Agricultural Communications. She is the granddaughter of Sweet Potato Joe of Livingston.



Nicole Alvernaz



October 8th:
**Planning Out of
the Box.—**
Merced City Hall

**Sam Pipes Room— 678 W
18th St. Merced—6pm-8 pm**

October 9th: Blueprint Workshop. 301 W Main
St, Merced — Historic Merced Theatre—3pm
and 6pm

Our Mission is to Educate and Build Alliances to protect
our uniquely productive California Central Valley farmland.

October 11th: Blueprint Workshop. 830 Sixth
St —Miller Lux Building, Los Banos 11 — 3pm
and 6pm.

October 17th: Blueprint Workshop. 11305
Balico Ave — Balico Veterans Hall — 3pm and
6pm.

November 17: 2050 Ideal Future— Responses
from Communities.



Valley Land Alliance

PO Box 102
Cressey, California 95312