RCRC
RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES OF CALIFORNIA

FACT SHEET

- The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly known as the Williamson Act, is California's most effective on-the-ground tool for the preservation of farmland and agricultural land.

- More than two-thirds of the state's agricultural land—over 16 million acres—is protected and preserved under the Williamson Act.

- In addition to preserving California's vital food-producing farm and grazing land, the Williamson Act benefits the state in other important ways. It preserves open space and wildlife habitat, protects watersheds, and helps reduce greenhouse gases. Williamson Act-protected crop and grazing lands "sequester" or absorb carbon dioxide.

- The Williamson Act has significantly reduced leap frog development through the preservation of contiguous areas of agricultural land. This is especially true of farmland at the urban fringes of our State that are especially threatened by development.

- The Williamson Act is one of the few in-place programs that is highly consistent with the goals and objectives of both AB 32, California's 2006 law to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and SB 375, which builds on AB 32 to control greenhouse gas emissions by curbing sprawl.

- The Williamson Act greatly assists in the preservation of the agricultural industry in California which is second only to tourism in its economic impact. California is the nation's No. 1 agricultural producer and exporter, with gross agricultural gross cash receipts of more than $36 billion in 2007.

- One-third of California farms wouldn't survive without the Williamson Act, which allows farmers to pay taxes at a lower rate than the full market or development value.

- The Williamson Act is also vital to the financial health of local government, particularly in the current economy. Williamson Act "subvention payments" are one of the very few sources of discretionary revenue at the local level to provide vital health and safety services to people in local jurisdictions. Without these

state reimbursements, many counties will be forced to cut deeply into local public safety and health and human service programs.

- As part of the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF) established by the State of California in 1993, counties were assured that Williamson Act subventions would help backfill for their loss of property tax revenues that were shifted to K-14 education. California should not renege on that agreement because the state still takes local property tax revenue to fund schools.

- The nearly $38 million in subventions helps replace the State's share of foregone property tax revenues lost due to county participation in the Williamson Act Program.

- The bottom line: Failure to fund the Williamson Act subventions will ultimately lead to the permanent loss of some of the nation's and world's richest agricultural soil and land—and to a loss of jobs in California rural counties already suffering from high unemployment. Additionally, not funding the Williamson Act negatively impacts an agricultural industry critical to California's economic health.

- In conclusion, there are few programs in California that provide such broad-based benefits for such a nominal investment. The contributions by the State represent just a small fraction of 1 percent of the overall state budget.