

# Committee on Resources

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## TESTIMONY OF

BILL PAULI, PRESIDENT

CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

TO THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS RESOURCES  
COMMITTEE

REGARDING THE GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

H.R. 532 (Lantos)

JULY 15, 2003

Chairman Radanovich and members of the Committee, my name is Bill Pauli. I am a pear and wine grape grower from Mendocino County and I am the President of the California Farm Bureau Federation, the state's largest farm organization representing more than 37,000 farm families. It is an honor to be able to address this committee regarding H.R. 532, a bill that would add thousands of acres to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

I begin this statement with the Policy of the American Farm Bureau Federation on Land Ownership. Our policy states:

"We oppose further expansion of federal land ownership, and we support a national policy of no net loss of private lands." Another statement from this policy states: "Tax exempt environmental organizations should not have access to public money for funding land acquisitions. In addition, we oppose the transfer of land owned by these groups to any federal agency."

That statement clearly defines our objectives for land ownership and preserving agriculture. When you add to this, the multi-billion dollar backlog that the Park Service is facing for operation and maintenance, we could easily be asking the question, why does the agency need more land, especially this unique and productive resource when they don't have enough money to manage the land they already own?

Of the more than 4000 acres included in this proposal, we are concerned about preserving agriculture on nearly 300 acres of land. You will note that I did not say preserving land as there is absolutely no threat that this land will ever be developed. Our focus is on preserving agriculture.

This is the same focus we have when the California Farm Bureau Federation opposes urban development on productive farm and ranch properties, including those lands under our State's Williamson Act. Yes, an organization that supports property rights has opposed projects where landowners were attempting to exercise their "perceived right." Others believe selling to the Park Service is their right. In both cases, we have sided with maintaining agriculture.

This land has been identified by its current landowner as some of the richest farmland in California. But it's clear that it is coveted for uses which are not compatible with farming. When this legislation was being considered in 2001, the Park Service indicated "The addition of these lands will preserve exceptional natural, scenic and recreation resources displaying values commensurate with or exceeding those of the lands currently within the boundary of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area." Regarding the future of agriculture in the area, the Park Service noted: "The properties include many old trails and farm roads that could be easily adapted to recreational use, which may become the principle visitor activity within the area."

I am sure the Park Service will offer assurances that farming can continue, but, designating agricultural land

a park is all but a death knell for farming. Farming may be allowed for a short time. After this bill passes, the Park Service will evaluate its objectives in managing the land. In balancing the needs of the public versus those of maintaining agriculture, agriculture rarely wins.

The key point here is the courts or Congress can always redefine farming and ranching on public land regardless of what is intended in this Congress. By including the farmland in this boundary, you will ensure that farming is at best a short-term use for the land.

We have learned from experience that the last thing you do to preserve agriculture is to include the land into a park boundary, as the goals of the Park Service are not compatible with preserving agriculture.

This farmland is unique due to the area's location and climatic conditions and it's some of the most productive agricultural property in California. More importantly, it is some of the most productive land left in San Mateo County. The 300 acres represents roughly ten percent of the county's available cropland.

As an urban county, agriculture still remains an extremely important industry grossing \$183,148,000.00 in 2002. Agriculture is still the number one employer on the coastal side of San Mateo County including some 50 jobs tied to agricultural production on this property.

This is land that is intensively farmed producing a wide variety of valuable crops. For example, the production of Brussels sprouts grosses close to \$7,000 per acre annually, a valuable contribution to the local economy that multiplies as the product moves from the farm to the consumer. In addition, a critical component of the current farm operation is a retail farm stand that sells directly to consumers. It's hard to manage intense agricultural production and a produce stand under Park Service guidelines.

San Mateo County is at a critical juncture. For agriculture to survive, there must be sufficient farming to support a viable infrastructure. From the people who work the fields, to those who provide needed production tools, to the processors, all segments of the local agricultural industry face an uncertain future as agricultural properties are being "retired." Some of this is due to urban sprawl. Even more parcels are falling victim to habitat sprawl, where agricultural lands are being converted to habitat. At ten percent of workable cropland, this property is a critical component to maintaining a viable agricultural economy in San Mateo County.

#### Our solution

The exclusion of some of the most productive agricultural land in our state (approximately 300 acres) from the boundary of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

We could work collectively with USDA to direct funding under the Farmland Protection Program to help facilitate the transfer of the land to private landowners who will maintain the land in agriculture.

We ask for your help in ensuring that agriculture remains a viable industry and important employer in San Mateo County.

We would gladly work with the bill's supporters and the authors for it's timely passage, once these critical changes are included.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the Park Service would offer to pay \$15 million to acquire the 4,262 Rancho Corral de Tierra and over 300 acres of property on the Devil's slide area for an average price of \$3,300 per acre. At \$3,300 per acre, there is a commitment to work with local interests to identify potential owners for the land. We believe that since the land faces no threat of urban development, the value to acquire the land should be reflective of current agricultural values.

With the amendments we have mentioned, the California Farm Bureau Federation is indicating its support for legislation that would add the 4000 acres to the recreation area. This addition should satisfy the needs of the Park Service to expand their holdings, while also meeting the needs of the local agricultural economy.

We thank you for this opportunity to speak today and we hope we can work together on a solution that will allow agriculture to survive in San Mateo County and that will ensure the future of this land will always be agriculture.