

Fresno City Council Kills Farmland Preservation, Again

By Joe
Moore

file photo

Credit Joe Moore / Valley Public Radio

Listen

Listening...

1:23

Listen to this report...



For the [second time in two months](#) the Fresno City Council has voted down a proposal to start a farmland preservation program. FM89's Joe Moore reports.

Mayor Ashley Swearengin's administration had wanted to apply for a \$100,000 state grant to help start the effort, which is a key part of the city's new general plan.

While the proposal lacked details, the overall concept could have resulted in something like this: a mandate to make developers pay to permanently preserve farmland outside the city, in exchange for permission to turn a farm inside the city limits into homes or businesses.

Swearengin says the program is essential in both complying with state law and in preserving the valley's top industry.

Swearengin: "We all would agree that productive farmland is foundations to Fresno's economy."

But just like in April, that prospect proved controversial, drawing vocal opposition from both developers and farmers, like Pat Ricchiuti, or PR Farms.

Ricchiuti: "If you look around and take a flight around this valley, we've got plenty of farmland. You know what we're losing? We're losing the farmers."

One of the biggest critics of the plan is councilmember Clint Olivier. He say he's never had a farmer complain to him about losing land to home builders.

Olivier: "The ag industry and the housing industry are not facing off at all. They're united in asking us to leave them alone."

While the grant now appears dead, councilmember Lee Brand says he would support using money from the city's general fund to start a similar program, but one that he hopes won't be "punitive" against developers. Others want the county to take the lead.

According to the American Farmland Trust, Fresno County has the smallest amount of farmland held under conservation easements in the valley, while the amount of farmland converted to development from 1990 to 2008 was among the highest.