

Sonoma County Land Conservation Act Program General Information

PJR-104

The goal of the County's agricultural preserve program is long-term preservation of agricultural and open space lands. The program is governed by the California Land Conservation Act (also known as the Williamson Act), the County's Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones, and the recorded contract between the owner and the county, which runs with the land.

The California Land Conservation Act allows the County and owners of agricultural and open space land to voluntarily enter into agreements that restrict the owner's use of the land to agricultural and/or open space uses and uses compatible with those agricultural and/or open space uses, in exchange for a reduction in property tax assessment. Land Conservation Contracts have ten (10)-year automatically renewing terms. The County also offers Farmland Security Zone Contracts, which are similar to Land Conservation Contracts, but for twenty (20)-year automatically renewing terms.

Before land may be restricted by a Land Conservation Contract it must be located within a designated "Agricultural Preserve." A preserve generally must be a minimum of 100 acres, unless certain findings are made by the Board of Supervisors. Land within the preserve also must be restricted by a zoning that is compatible with the agricultural or open space use of the land. Before land may qualify for a Farmland Security Zone and FSZ Contract, it must be located within a designated agricultural preserve and be restricted by an existing Land Conservation Contract.

In addition to being located within a preserve, to qualify for a contract, the land must be devoted to an agricultural use, generate certain levels of income from commercial agricultural use of the land, must be a minimum size -- either 10 or 40 acres depending on the type of land, -- and any non-agricultural or non-open space use of the land must be an allowable compatible use as defined and listed by the Uniform Rules.

The contracts will continue to automatically renew at the end of each year, unless a Notice of Non-Renewal has been recorded. Beyond non-renewal, there are limited circumstances under which an owner may seek immediate cancellation, termination, or rescission of the contract.

Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department

2550 Ventura Avenue

Santa Rosa, CA95403-2829

(707) 565-1900

Fax (707) 565-1103