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The Abandoned Mine Lands Unit reminds you to **Stay Out and Stay Alive**.
Call 1-877-OLD MINE to report a mine.

For Immediate Release
NR# 2000-34
September 13, 2000

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CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION APPLAUDS IMPERIAL COUNTY FOR ADOPTING WILLIAMSON ACT

SACRAMENTO -- California Department of Conservation Director Darryl Young praised today's unanimous decision by the Imperial County Board of Supervisors to adopt the Williamson Act, a voluntary tool used throughout the state for agricultural land preservation.

"Imperial County's population is growing quickly, so it's likely that some of the best farmland in the state and the world could face development pressure," Young said. "Farmland is a critical, nonrenewable resource, and the Board of Supervisors' decision to implement the Williamson Act program is a wise step toward prudent land-use planning."

Imperial County ranks No. 11 in the state in agricultural production. It is among the leading producers of cattle, alfalfa, lettuce, carrots and sugar beats. According to DOC's Division of Land Resource Protection, the county had nearly 555,000 acres in agricultural use as of the most recent survey, 1996-98.

It is estimated that the Williamson Act saves agricultural landowners from 20 to 75 percent in property tax liability each year. A survey of landowners in Williamson Act contracts concluded that one in three would not be farming or ranching without the act's benefits.

To partially compensate for local property tax reductions for enrolled lands, the state pays each county and city participating in the Williamson Act an annual "subvention" payment based on the amount of acreage and the quality of the agricultural or open space land enrolled.

"The Williamson Act is a time-tested method of discouraging leapfrog development and the premature loss of farmland," said Erik Vink, assistant director for DOC's Division of Land Resource Protection. "There are Williamson Act contracts on about half of the state's 30 million acres of agricultural and open-space land, and the act protects about 70 percent of

California's prime farmland. We're very pleased that Imperial County has decided to give its landowners the opportunity to make use of the Williamson Act."

California's agricultural production totaled nearly \$27 billion in 1998. But the state's population of more than 34 million is expected to grow to 50 million by 2025, and many acres of agricultural land are being developed to accommodate that growth. According to the California Department of Finance, Imperial County's population is expected to grow from 150,381 currently to 504,200 in 2040.

"While California remains the nation's most productive agricultural state, much of our farmland is in the path of development," DOC Director Young said. "The Williamson Act is a tremendous tool to help balance the needs of agriculture and growth. We hope that Imperial County will adopt the Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) program as well."

The Farmland Security Zone program provides landowners the opportunity to convert existing Williamson Act contracts, which last a minimum of 10 years, into minimum 20-year contracts that provide additional property tax savings. In participating counties, landowners whose land is not enrolled in a Williamson Act contract can petition to place their land directly into an FSZ contract.

With Imperial County on board, 50 of the state's 58 counties have adopted the Williamson Act. Of the non-participating counties, Alpine, Del Norte, Inyo, Modoc, Mono and San Francisco have very little agricultural land. Merced and Imperial counties this year became the first new Williamson Act counties since 1977. Sutter and Yuba counties recently have indicated strong interest in participation.

The California Land Conservation Act -- better known by the surname of its author, the late John Williamson, a former assemblyman -- was passed in 1965 to balance the pressures of urban growth on agriculture by giving farmers and ranchers an incentive to remain in agriculture. DOC's Division of Land Resource Protection administers the Williamson Act.

When land is enrolled in a Williamson Act contract, the landowner is taxed at a rate based on the actual use of the land for agricultural purposes as opposed to its unrestricted market value. In return, the landowner commits to restricting use of the land to agricultural or open space for at least 10 years.

More information on the Williamson Act, Farmland Security Zones and other Department of Conservation programs is available at www.consrv.ca.gov.

In addition to helping safeguard agricultural and open-space land, the Department of Conservation administers the state's beverage container

recycling program; regulates oil, gas and geothermal wells in the state; studies and maps earthquakes, landslides and mineral resources; and ensures reclamation of land used for mining.

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For Immediate Release
NR # 2000-13
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Contact: Carol Dahmen
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INLAND EMPIRE FARMLAND TAKEN OUT OF CULTIVATION

New California Department of Conservation Maps Show
6,057 Acres of Farmland Urbanized in San Bernardino, Riverside and
Imperial Counties

SACRAMENTO -- According to new maps released by the Department of Conservation, a total of 7,885 acres of farmland in Riverside, San Bernardino and Imperial counties were taken out of cultivation from 1996-98. Of that, 6,057 acres were converted to urban use.

Also, 1,127 acres of grazing land in San Bernardino County and 160 acres in Riverside County were urbanized. There was no grazing land conversion in Imperial County.

Looking ahead, 23,974 acres of farmland in Riverside County (easily the most in the state) and an additional 1,583 in San Bernardino County were committed to non-agricultural use. Data was not available for Imperial County. Typically, this is land earmarked for development. In some cases, the development, such as sanitary sewer installation, already may be underway.

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, part of DOC's Division of Land Resource Protection, maps 44.1 million acres of California's public and private land to produce a major study every two years. The latest, *Farmland Conversion Report 1996-98*, will be released in June.

Mapping is ongoing in other areas of the state, but final maps covering these three counties have been issued to local planning officials and interested organizations such as county Farm Bureaus, Local Agency Formation Commissions, planning consultants and area resource conservation districts. The maps help local entities evaluate land-use planning decisions.

"Local governments can use this information to balance the needs of the

agricultural economy with those of a growing population," said Department of Conservation Director Darryl Young. "These maps are a useful tool for counties such as these with rapid population growth."

During the current mapping cycle (1996-98), a net total of 5,646 acres of farmland were taken out of cultivation in Riverside County. Of that, 4,770 acres were urbanized. In San Bernardino County, there was a net drop of 1,536 cultivated acres; 870 were urbanized. In

Imperial County, 703 acres were taken out of cultivation, of which 417 were urbanized.

According to a 1999 USDA report, Riverside ranked ninth among California counties in gross agricultural production (nearly \$1.2 billion), Imperial was 10th (just over \$1 billion) and San Bernardino was 14th (\$703 million).

Farmland in these counties is expected to face continuing development pressure. The California Department of Finance projects that San Bernardino County's population will grow from about 1.78 million in July of this year to nearly 3.1 million in July of 2020. Riverside County's population is projected to grow from nearly 1.6 million to more than 2.9 million and Imperial's from 152,300 to 222,600.

Where is land conversion occurring in these counties? Here are examples:

- ◆ San Bernardino County: 23 changes directly from agricultural land to urban, mainly in the southern part of the county; new houses, schools and commercial/industrial expansion along I-15 and state highway 395, especially near Adelanto; a 400-acre site formerly used for agriculture being mined in the Lucerne Valley.
- ◆ Riverside County: 36 total changes of land use in Indio; 20 changes of agricultural land directly to urban in Corona, including two golf courses; eight such changes in San Jacinto and 7 in Perris; six new golf courses in the county (including Corona).
- ◆ Imperial County: housing developments in Brawley; Sunflower Elementary School, houses and light industry in El Centro; a new Toys "R" Us, houses, a new hotel in Calexico; a trailer park near Bard.

Through the Department of Conservation, the state offers programs that provide financial incentives to keep land in agricultural use. The California Farmland Conservancy Program makes monies available to local governments, land trusts or resource conservation districts that create agricultural easements by purchasing permanent development rights from willing landowners. Farmland Security Zone and Williamson Act contracts provide potential tax breaks to landowners that commit to keeping their land in agricultural use for periods of 20 or 10 years, respectively.

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