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## **Ranchers, Environmentalists Welcome Plan to Protect Ranchland in Sierra Foothills**

*New general plan protects 425,000 acres from sprawl development*

MARIPOSA, CA –Mariposa County should be proud of its new 20-year growth plan that will protect 425,000 acres of ranchland, according to a diverse group of community leaders. After an arduous, five-year process, a new Mariposa County General Plan, adopted today, achieves what the county’s citizens prize most: protection of the county’s rural character by preserving its beautiful and productive farmland and natural landscapes.

Ranching has been a way of life in this Sierra foothill county, home of Yosemite Valley, for 150 years. But like so many parts of rural California, Mariposa County faces growth pressure that could lead to traffic, sprawl, and the destruction of a rural way of life. The creation of the new UC Merced campus, less than 10 miles from the Mariposa County line, has increased that growth pressure.

Now, with the adoption of a new general plan -- the “blueprint” for growth and development for the next 20 years – 425,000 acres of Mariposa’s ranchlands will be protected from urban development, a cause for satisfaction for everyone who participated in the process.

“We all participated in good faith and we hope that our Board of Supervisors will fully implement this community-sponsored general plan,” said Cathie Pierce, president of the Mariposa County Farm Bureau. “We are very encouraged by the direction that our supervisors are going. Farm Bureau will stay involved as the plan comes to life, to make sure it achieves its goals to protect family farms and ranches.”

Mariposa County ranch lands are characterized by rolling, oak-studded hillsides that are important in the preservation of water quality in the creeks and streams that lead to the Central Valley. At the same time, these lands generate nearly \$100 million for the local economy.

**(more)**

The county's ranchers and environmental representatives were very concerned that growth would damage wildlife habitat, increase traffic and spoil scenic vistas. There was also considerable alarm that too much development would fragment the county's rangeland resources.

Environmental advocates, including Mariposans for the Environment and Responsible Government (MERG), and leaders of the Farm Bureau shared many common goals in this effort and the members of the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors took note of that as it finalized the plan to preserve the county's rural economy by protecting rangeland from development.

"This final plan is a significant improvement over previous drafts," according to Bart Brown of MERG. "A lot of hard work went into this plan by the public, the Planning Commission, the Board and County staff. Everyone who participated deserves our citizens' gratitude for their comments and support and presence at the countless meetings that were required to produce this important document."

Regional and statewide leaders are also welcoming the plan. Sierra Nevada Alliance, an organization that tracks environmental issues throughout the 24-county region, hopes Mariposa's success will inspire other Sierra counties to plan appropriately for growth.

"The Sierra's population is expected to triple by 2040," said Autumn Bernstein, Land Use Coordinator for Sierra Nevada Alliance. "With careful planning, we can accommodate growth while preserving those qualities which make the Sierra such a wonderful place to live and visit. I hope other Sierra counties will follow Mariposa's lead."

Mariposa County's new general plan is scheduled for adoption on Monday, December 18. The plan replaces an outdated 1981 general plan. The new plan will govern all decisions about where and how to locate new housing, stores, roads and commercial properties.

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