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## **Peninsula Open Space Trust Announces Groundbreaking Initiative to Triple Preserved Farmland in San Mateo County**

*Farmland Futures Initiative aims to stem the effects of the national agricultural crisis on regional farms, and preserve half of the remaining farmland on the San Mateo coast.*

**Palo Alto, Calif.** – The Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) today announced a groundbreaking new initiative to triple the amount of preserved farmland acreage and the number of preserved farms on the San Mateo coast over the next 10 years.

One of the most ambitious farming conservation programs in the history of the Bay Area, POST's Farmland Futures Initiative seeks to conserve over a thousand acres in one of the world's priciest real estate markets – and stem the dramatic loss of local farmland that has threatened the future of Bay Area farming and the livelihood of local farmers.

"Protecting local working land matters to our environment, our farmers and our community," said POST President Walter Moore. "Farms are vital to the health of our local ecosystems, waterways and the region's overall food system, growing the farm-fresh foods that we as a

society value and cherish. Our Farmland Futures Initiative aims to protect San Mateo County's valuable remaining farmland as farms before they are lost for good."

Since the 1980s, the Bay Area's nine counties have lost nearly 200,000 acres of agricultural land, with 35 percent of San Mateo County farmland falling prey to development or no longer in production. "If farmland loss continues at this rate, there will soon be no working farms left," Moore said.

Our Farmland Futures Initiative seeks to stem this alarming trend through a combination of land acquisition and agricultural conservation easements to triple the number of farms and farmland acres permanently protected for agriculture on the San Mateo Coast over the next decade. Meeting these goals will increase the number of farms protected on the San Mateo County coast from 11 to 33 and grow the total acreage of protected productive farmland from 750 to 2,250 acres.

POST is raising \$25 million to finance the effort – funds that will be used for land protection and infrastructure improvement to ensure that farms are able to use water and other natural resources effectively for decades to come. To date, POST has raised more than \$7.5 million in gifts and pledges towards this goal with lead support from Diane Greene and Mendel Rosenblum, the Leslie Family Foundation, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the Sand Hill Foundation, Sandra and John Thompson, and Karie and David Thomson.

"We strongly believe in POST's mission," said Susan Ford Dorsey, President of the Sand Hill Foundation. "This initiative brings together three things we are passionate about - preserving land, protecting it and making sure that it is taken care of in perpetuity. Now is the time to recognize farmland as a crucial part of open space conservation and farmers as important partners in POST's work. We hope others will follow us and support the Farmland Futures Initiative."

The program will also help retain Bay Area farmers, many of whom have farmed in San Mateo County for decades, but are challenged by the very high cost of local farmland -- on average, more than eight times the national average and four times the California average. These high costs have made it difficult for long-term farmers to hold on to land and nearly impossible for young farmers to get started.

Our Farmland Futures Initiative will rely on multiple strategies to help keep farmers and ranchers on the land, including purchasing land for lease or transfer and agricultural conservation easements on privately held land, to ensure that agricultural lands remain in active production.

"Farmland Futures will preserve this precious land and grow the local agricultural community with the hope of bringing it back to a viable level so that it can thrive in perpetuity," said POST Board president Jan Garrod. "If this pristine land is paved over, we will never get it back. Conservation and farming work hand in hand."

Located between two of the nation's leading agricultural programs at UC Davis and UC Santa Cruz, San Mateo County farms draw some of the nation's brightest farming talent and offer resources to experiment with cutting-edge advancements in agricultural practices, a complementary benefit to POST's work.

POST's conservation strategies have already allowed farming families like the Lea family in Half Moon Bay to continue growing Brussels sprouts, artichokes, peas, fava beans and pumpkins on Cabrillo Farms where the family had worked for three generations as tenant farmers.

Between 2001-2003, POST preserved the 4,200-acre Rancho Corral de Tierra property near Half Moon Bay, holding back the 300-acres of farmland that included Cabrillo Farms when it transferred most of the property to the National Park Service in 2011. In 2014, POST sold the farmland to the Leas with an agricultural conservation easement, ensuring the land is protected and the family is able to continue farming these fields for generations to come.

"POST made it possible for us to own this land," said farmer David Lea, whose grandfather began the family's farming tradition after emigrating from Italy in the 1920s. "It's a tremendous relief to know that our family can continue doing the work we know in an area we love."

POST is in a unique position to conserve farmland locally. As one of the leading land trusts in the United States, POST has successfully conserved more than 75,000 acres of open space, farms and parkland in the San Mateo County region since 1977.

"Farmland is an integral part of our lives here in San Mateo County – it matters to the food we eat, the breathtaking beauty of the County's coastline we enjoy, the water we drink and the trail corridors we use," Moore said. "Farmland is essential to our way of life, and this initiative will help protect that land for generations to come."

### **About the Peninsula Open Space Trust**

POST is a leading private, nonprofit land trust that protects and cares for open space, farms and parkland in and around Silicon Valley. Since its founding in 1977, POST has been responsible for saving more than 75,000 acres as permanent open space and parkland in San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties. [www.openspacetrust.org](http://www.openspacetrust.org)