



February 15, 2022

The Honorable Jim Patterson
Member, California State Assembly
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0023

**RE: Assembly Bill 1773 - SUPPORT
As Introduced February 3, 2022**

Dear Assembly Member Patterson:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) and the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), we are pleased to support Assembly Bill 1773, restoring funding for the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act).

The Williamson Act is a state-established program that preserves agricultural and open space lands through property tax incentives and voluntary restrictive use contracts. Private landowners, in exchange for lower property taxes, enter into rolling 10- or 20-year contractual commitments with participating counties to keep their land in agricultural and/or compatible open space use. The Williamson Act has been very effective, protecting over 16.5 million acres or nearly one-third of all privately-owned land in California.

Of California's more than 100 million acres of land, 38 million are range and pastureland, resulting in a revenue of \$3.19 billion in cattle and calves alone. The mixture of annual vegetation, perennial grasses and shrubs preserved on these open spaces not only provide forage for domestic livestock, but for the countless species of wildlife which make their home in regions protected by the Williamson Act. Williamson Act subvention funds are critical to keeping this open space open for the benefit of all Californians.

In a time where increasing land prices can offer a tempting reason for owners to parcel and subdivide crucial farmland and open space, the tax relief Williamson Act contracts provide offer even more enticing benefits to keeping working lands working, open and contiguous for the wildlife and agriculture that depend on them—and the counties and towns that depend on the promised funds from the state.

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The Williamson Act was intended to be a partnership among the State, counties, and landowners. Counties, in exchange for implementing the state goal of farm and ranch land preservation, were to receive a partial replacement of their foregone property tax from the land enrolled in the program. State subventions have not been paid to counties since 2009. Without these payments counties have struggled to fully fund public priorities, such as public safety staffing. State subventions were one of California rural counties' few discretionary revenue sources for local programs, including public safety.

Until it was eliminated in the 2009-10 state budget, state funding for Williamson Act subventions ranged between \$35 million and \$39 million. We strongly believe that reviving state funding for this program is a cost-effective way to preserve agricultural and open space lands.

For the reasons stated, we urge the Legislature and the Governor to recommit and once again partner with counties and landowners to preserve these important lands by funding the Williamson Act Subvention Program in the 2022-2023 State Budget, as AB 1773 directs.

For the above reasons, we are proud to support AB 1773. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mary-Ann Warmerdam of RCRC at mwarmerdam@rcrcnet.org or Catherine Freeman of CSAC at cfreeman@counties.org.

Sincerely,



Mary-Ann Warmerdam
Senior Vice President for Government Affairs
RCRC



CATHERINE FREEMAN
Legislative Representative
CSAC