

## **WILLIAMSON ACT**

**The California Legislature passed the California Conservation Act in 1965. It is now commonly known by the surname of its author, former Assembly member John Williamson.**

**The Williamson Act was created to balance the pressure of urban growth by providing an incentive for farmers and ranchers to remain in agriculture.**

**The Williamson Act has been serving the conservation of California's agricultural and open space lands for 35 years.**

### **WHAT IS THE WILLIAMSON ACT?**

**The Williamson Act is a voluntary land conservation program. It is administered by counties and cities with technical assistance from the California Department of Conservation. Within Placer County approximately 80,000 acres are in the Williamson Act program.**

**The Act has several purposes:**

- **To preserve farmland for a secure food supply for the state and nation and for future generations.**
- **To maintain agriculture's contribution to local and state economic health.**
- **To provide economic relief to tax-burdened farmers and ranchers**
- **To promote orderly city growth and discourage leapfrog development and premature loss of farmland.**
- **To preserve open space for its scenic, social, aesthetic and wildlife values.**

### **HOW DOES THE WILLIAMSON ACT WORK?**

**When land is enrolled in a Williamson Act contract, landowners are taxed at a lower rate, using a scale based on the actual use of**

**the land for agricultural purposes as opposed to its unrestricted market value. In turn, the landowners commit to restricting the use of their land to agricultural and open space uses for 10 years.**

**Counties and cities lose property tax revenue when land is enrolled in the Williamson Act contract. To partially compensate for this loss, the state pays each county and city participating in the Williamson Act a “subvention” payment based on the amount of acreage and the quality of agricultural or open space land enrolled.**

## **FACTS ABOUT THE WILLIAMSON ACT**

**Approximately 16 million acres or about one half of the state’s 30 million acres of agricultural and open space land is currently protected under the Williamson Act.**

**Nearly 70 percent of the state’s prime agricultural land is protected under the act.**

**One in three Williamson Act farmers and ranchers say that without the Act they would not be in business. And according to a recent University of California survey, 90 percent of state and local officials and leaders support continuing the Program despite its costs.**

**In 1993 Governor Wilson enacted legislation providing expanded protection and safeguarding of farmland by increasing subventions from \$14 million to \$35 million. Nearly all of the 47 counties participating in the Act will receive more funding with the new payment schedule.**

## **HAS THE WILLIAMSON ACT WORKED?**

**Forty-seven of the state’s 52 agricultural counties and 20 cities participate in the Act.**

**After 35 years the Williamson Act is still California’s only statewide agricultural land protection program.**

**The Williamson Act is estimated to save agricultural landowners from 20 percent to 75 percent in property tax liability each year.**

**The last state documented study showed that farmers had a total tax saving of approximately \$120 million due to the Williamson Act.**

**In addition to the benefit of protecting farmland from land speculation and urbanization, the Williamson Act is increasingly used as an effective land use planning tool by local governments.**

***Provided by the California Department of Conservation at  
www.conserv.ca.gov***

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