



**P.O. Box 935, San Andreas, CA 95249 • (209) 772-1463 • [www.calaverascap.com](http://www.calaverascap.com)**

***Protecting our rural environment by promoting citizen participation  
in sustainable land use planning since 2006***

Thomas P. Infusino, ESQ  
P.O. Box 792  
Pine Grove, CA 95665  
(209) 295-8866  
[tomi@volcano.net](mailto:tomi@volcano.net)

Ellie Routt, Executive Director  
Mother Lode Land Trust  
PO Box 1435  
Jackson, CA 95642

April 30, 2020

**RE: The Community Action Project and the Calaveras Planning Coalition support the proposed Garamendi agricultural conservation easement.**

Dear Ellie,

On behalf of the Community Action Project (CAP) Governing Committee and as the Facilitator for the Calaveras Planning Coalition, I am writing to support the proposed agricultural conservation easement on 650 acres of the historic Garamendi Ranch near Mokelumne Hill, California. The use of USDA-NRCS-Agricultural Conservation Easement Program funds for the Garamendi easement would further the program's purpose to protect agricultural lands by limiting non-agricultural uses.

CAP is a grassroots citizen participation project in Calaveras County, California whose mission is to protect and improve the natural and built environments in Calaveras County by empowering people to claim their rights and participate in local government. CAP's primary program is the Calaveras Planning Coalition, which is a federation of regional and local organizations, community groups, and concerned individuals who promote public participation in land use and

resource planning to ensure a healthy human, natural, and economic environment now and in the future.

The proposed conservation easement is consistent with CAP's vision to:

- preserve our rural quality of life
- protect our natural environment and agricultural lands
- promote locally owned viable businesses
- provide jobs for residents
- preserve our historical and cultural resources, and
- empower people to improve their communities.

## **I. The proposed easement supports multiple federal, state, regional, and local objectives for resource conservation.**

### **A) Open Space and Agricultural Land Conservation**

The State of California's Department of Conservation and its local land use planning efforts share the USDA's commitment to keep agricultural lands in agricultural production. The state requires local governments to prepare plans for the long-term conservation of open space. The agricultural land components of such plans must identify priority agricultural lands for conservation. The proposed conservation easement for the historic Garamendi Ranch meets the state's objective to conserve open space lands for agriculture whenever possible.

### **B) Wildlife Habitat Conservation**

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife shares the Federal Government's support for maintaining viable wildlife populations. In 2015, the Department completed the Northern Sierra Nevada Foothills Wildlife Connectivity Project, a study of habitat connectivity needs which includes Calaveras County. The report expanded on other work noting the need for the long-term conservation of local habitat linkages along riparian corridors in the region. The proposed conservation easement on the historic Garamendi Ranch would provide long-term conservation of such a habitat link along a riparian corridor.

### **C) Water Quality**

In response to recent experience, local and regional utilities have come to support the protection of water quality. In recent years neighboring Amador County had to change its point of diversion on the Mokelumne River in part due to turbidity from the runoff from local development. The proposed conservation easement will preclude such development on the historic Garamendi Ranch, and thereby continue to protect water quality.

### **D) Greenhouse Gas Reduction**

The State of California is cooperating with states across this nation and around the world to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) production and to avoid the perils of extreme climate change. Among the ecosystem benefits of ranching is the carbon sequestration needed to reduce the

concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The proposed conservation easement would secure this carbon sequestration resource for this and future generations. Moreover, it provides a good example to Calaveras County as it develops its own GHG reduction plan over the next two years. We hope that ranch land conservation easements become a key GHG reduction strategy in the local plan.

## **E) Land Use**

In 2019, Calaveras County completed its General Plan Update, which was over 13 years in the making. That plan calls for directing residential and commercial development into and adjacent to existing community centers while conserving farm, ranch, forest and mineral lands for resource production. The proposed conservation easement on the historic Garamendi Ranch will allow development in and around the existing communities of Mokelumne Hill, San Andreas, and Valley Springs, while conserving land in between those communities for long-term resource production.

## **II. Federal, state, non-profit and individual efforts are still needed to make up for the county government's past failures to cooperate with critical conservation efforts.**

We at the CAP understand that in the past the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors has failed in many respects to locally implement plans to achieve federal and state conservation objectives. For example, USDA statistics indicate that nearly 200,000 acres (over half) of the rangelands in Calaveras County went out of production between the years 2000 and 2012. Nevertheless, the County government has not identified priority open space and agricultural lands for long-term conservation and has not approved programs to mitigate the conversion of agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses.

In addition, Calaveras County is home to an estimated 30 plant and wildlife species of special concern, yet the County government has failed to even start a habitat conservation plan for threatened and endangered species. Similarly, while the State of California established a GHG reduction target in 2006, the County government has done nothing yet to reduce GHGs in response.

We hope that these local government failures will not discourage federal and state agencies from supporting private conservation easements. The new General Plan approved in 2019 promises future actions to address agricultural land conservation, habitat conservation, and greenhouse gas reduction. While we await these future efforts, federal and state conservation objectives will continue to be met through the efforts of private individuals and foundations working with non-profit organizations and with the assistance of federal and state funding.


In 2015, the California Conservation Easement Database estimated that there were 18,723 acres (but there is likely more) permanently protected by conservation easements in Calaveras County. Since then, the 3,257-acre Airola Ranch has been placed under a conservation easement. By adding the historic Garamendi Ranch to nearly 22,000 acres of permanently protected lands, we

can lay the foundation upon which to build an enduring landscape of agricultural open space in Calaveras County.

### **III. It is CAP's honor to support the Garamendi easement proposal.**

In over 30 years as a resource planning professional, I cannot recall seeing a private project that is so consistent with such a variety of federal, state and local objectives. CAP is honored to add its support for the proposed Garamendi conservation easement on 650 acres of historic Calaveras rangeland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Thomas P. Infusino". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thomas P. Infusino

cc:  
CAP Governing Committee  
Robert Garamendi