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Ceremony Celebrates Agricultural Conservation in Lincoln

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A 47-acre ranch near Lincoln with a reputation for growing some of the region's finest organic mandarin oranges provided the setting for an unusual, if not unique celebration Tuesday.

About 50 people joined owner Richard F. Ferreira of Side Hill Citrus Farm for the low-key, but jubilant celebration. In the crowd were officials from Placer County, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), Placer Land Trust, and Emigrant Trails Greenway Trust.

The occasion: a dedication ceremony celebrating an agricultural conservation easement on the property acquired by the county and its partners.

County Second District Supervisor Robert M. Weygandt addressed the crowd, noting that the easement will ensure the farm is preserved for agricultural uses in perpetuity. "It can't be split up," he said. "It will stay always as an agricultural opportunity."

In the audience was Alex Ferreira, Richard's father and Supervisor Weygandt's predecessor as the 2nd District representative on the Board of Supervisors. Alex Ferreira served on the board for 24 years and is regarded as

one of the first voices on the board who made the case that the county's continuing population growth should be balanced with conservation of open space and other natural resources.

The Side Hill easement will help protect an increasingly important sector of the local agricultural economy: locally grown and distributed fruits and vegetables.

"I'm really happy to be part of this," said Bob Kingman, the SNC's Mt. Lassen area manager. "The Sierra Nevada Conservancy recognizes the importance of preserving working landscapes in the Sierra Nevada region. Investing in projects like the Side Hill Citrus conservation easement help to protect water resources and preserve local agriculture."

Located on Pleasant Hill Road in rural Lincoln, the farm has approximately 2,500 mandarin orange trees, as well as Meyer lemons and grapefruit. During Wednesday's ceremony, speakers noted that Side Hill Citrus is a Share intensive organic farm that produces high-quality fruit and plays a role in the local farm-to-fork ment by selling directly to local consumers.

d Ferreira was a willing seller who agreed to accept \$20,000 below the appraised value of the vation easement, as a bargain sale contribution that reinforced his commitment to preserving the ltural value of the land.

de Hill easement is part of a ground-breaking effort by Placer County and its partners to conserve and : important natural resources throughout the county.

r Land Trust is proud to work with Placer County in what is shaping up to be the premiere public-private conservation partnership in California," said Land Trust Executive Director Jeff Darlington. "It's rare to see a county so actively protect the future of their agricultural economy and rural quality of life. We're really blessed to have local leaders who understand the benefits of investing in perpetuity."

Bob Gilliom of the Emigrant Trails Greenway Trust also spoke during the ceremony.

The conservation easement is consistent with several goals of the county's Placer Legacy Open Space and Agricultural Conservation Program: preserving the local agricultural economy, preventing the degradation of local soils and water quality, and protecting oak woodlands and riparian areas.

The easement also is in keeping with the proposed Placer County Conservation Plan, which would provide a comprehensive framework for complying with federal and state requirements for protecting vernal pools, endangered wildlife, habitats, and other natural resources.

The total cost of the transaction is estimated at \$350,000: \$285,000 for the purchase of the easement and \$65,000 in acquisition-related costs such as appraisal, survey, title, escrow, staff and legal costs.

The purchase was funded with \$185,000 from the SNC through its Proposition 84 Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands Grant Program, \$50,000 from the Emigrant Trails Greenway Trust, and \$50,000 from Placer County's Open Space Fund. Placer Land Trust contributed approximately \$6,000 toward the County's \$65,000 acquisition-related costs.

The SNC is a state agency whose mission is to improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region. The SNC has awarded more than \$50 million in grants throughout the region for projects that protect and enhance the health of California's primary watersheds.

Placer Land Trust is a private nonprofit organization that works with willing landowners, conservation partners and the community to permanently protect natural and agricultural lands in Placer County.

The Emigrant Trails Greenway Trust is a private foundation that supports the permanent conservation of important lands along the emigrant trail routes in the Sierra Nevada and western foothills.

An agricultural conservation easement is a voluntary, legally recorded deed restriction placed on a property used for agricultural production. The easement helps ensure the property remains in active production by removing development pressures and prohibiting practices that interfere with agricultural uses.

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