

Fall 2019

SOAR'S Contribution to a Sustainable Ventura County Economy

The economic health of Ventura County is an important concern of most county residents. SOAR protections are playing a major role in keeping Ventura County's economy on a long-term sustainable footing. Since the passage of SOAR protections countywide in 1998, Ventura County has avoided the extreme swings in economic activity that characterize many Southern California counties. SOAR's contribution to a sustainable economy result from a variety of impacts.

#1 SOAR has helped keep Ventura County's economy **more diverse, particularly by maintaining the critical mass of agricultural acreage needed to keep the ag support services viable**. Experts have found that when a county's ag land decreases below 100,000 acres, the ag support industries do not have enough demand to stay in business. SOAR has helped keep Ventura County's ag acreage about 100,000 acres.

#2 SOAR has kept Ventura County **from boom and bust housing construction cycles** as experienced by the Inland Empire counties. Those counties suffered significant declines in property values and economic activity during the 2008 recession. Ventura County remained one of the most stable and least affected counties in California during the recession.

#3 SOAR helps **maintain the high quality of life that attracts clean businesses** that employ high skilled and high wage jobs workers. These businesses in turn support sustainable local economies through both their business decisions and their community leadership.

We say it often but it is worth repeating. **SOAR does not stop housing development, SOAR gives voters the power to direct housing development away from ag/open spaces and towards existing urbanized areas.** That is where we have the greatest likelihood of building lower cost housing for those most in need. SOAR does not guarantee a sustainable economy but it does give us the best chance of any of the counties in Southern California.

MarketWatch, a highly respected American financial information website that provides business news, analysis, and stock market data named several Ventura County Cities as the most affordable to live in the State of California: <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/the-5-best-affordable-places-to-live-in-california-2019-04-30>

"With a reputation as one of the most expensive states in the U.S., California still has some economically sound places to reside – if you know where to look. Just to be clear: we didn't just create this list based solely on the cheapest places to live. The cost of living was part of our methodology, but so was the quality of life, as well as the key components of transportation, housing, food and utilities. Out of the five cities on our affordability list, all but one is situated in Ventura County with Oxnard, Ventura, Simi Valley. Vacaville and Camarillo making up the list."

VENTURA COUNTY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Residential Units Approved / In Development	
Camarillo	2,245
Fillmore	949
Moorpark	2,661
Ojai	37
Oxnard	1,825
Port Hueneme	114
Santa Paula	1,639
Simi Valley	2,970
Thousand Oaks	255
Ventura (city)	3,823
Ventura (county)	118
Total	16,636

Source: Planning department community development reports and staff communications, September 2019.

SOAR CHANGED THE BALANCE OF POLITICAL POWER IN VENTURA COUNTY

Advanced Sustainable Good Government in Ventura County

When the citizens of Ventura County first supported the SOAR initiatives in 1998, they accomplished more than they thought. Yes they dramatically slowed the march of LA urban sprawl into Ventura County. Yes they empowered the citizens to check the politicians on land use approvals. Yes the results have been remarkable as you see documented in other parts of this newsletter.

But the overwhelming support for SOAR expressed at the ballot box also broke the stranglehold on power of the old political elite who dominated Ventura County politics. This political elite, primarily led by large landowners, had dominated local politics from the inception of the county in 1850.

That dominant group overwhelmingly opposed the SOAR initiatives and spent heavily on the campaign in opposition. When SOAR defeated them in both 1998 and again in 2016 a significant political message was sent along with the protections of SOAR. Grassroots citizens, when organized and working together are able to beat back that old guard political elite and their enormous resources.

As their political power has decreased, Ventura County has seen a rise in good government policies.

Examples of the politics of this new era include:

- The adoption of strong campaign contribution limits
- Sustainable budgeting practices
- Surcharges on LA waste being dumped in Ventura County landfills
- The passage of wildlife corridors
- A growing commitment to sustainable groundwater pumping policies
- The use of renewable energy

The battle is not over as the old guard continue to use their significant financial resources to counter-attack through a number of organizations that they control but they no longer dominate the arena as they once did.

When you supported SOAR with your vote, your time and your donations, you accomplished much more than making Ventura County the first in Southern California to stop urban sprawl. You also allowed a new era of good government, more focused on the sustainable welfare of the general public, to blossom.

VENTURA COUNTY — LEADING THE WAY

Thanks to hundreds of SOAR supporters and open space advocates who spoke out for wildlife, our Ventura County Board of Supervisors passed a first-of-its-kind Wildlife Corridor Zone. The landmark zoning protects critical wildlife corridors that connect the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area with the Los Padres National Forest.

The protections complement the effort of the National Wildlife Federation to build a wildlife bridge over the 101 freeway at Liberty Canyon so wildlife can access large core areas of habitat.



Developed with the expertise of County planners, the input of scientists, ranchers, farmers, The Nature Conservancy, Ventura County Fire Department, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the new zoning puts prohibitions on bulldozing creeks, encourages dark night skies, and establishes fencing standards in the designated wildlife corridors.

We are happy to note that Ventura County's Wildlife Corridor zoning is now becoming a model for cities and counties that also want to protect their critical wildlife corridors.

Sustaining Agriculture in Ventura County

Land use experts are amazed that over 100,000 acres of productive agricultural land remains in Ventura County in spite of our proximity to the sprawling Los Angeles metropolis. Worldwide, ag land near major cities will become increasingly valuable as climate change impacts and adaption occur.

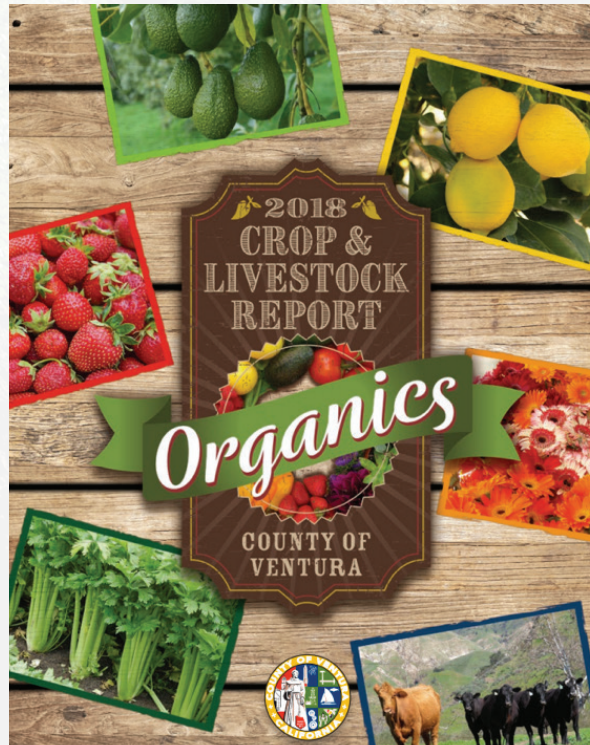
We are pleased SOAR protections contributed to this ag land preservation and even more a growing percentage of this ag land is devoted to organic farming.

A Good Read on Growing Sustainably

One of our favorite summer reads this year was the 2018 Ventura County Crop Report, which took us from a “bundle of giant worms” writhing and turning in the hands of organic farmer Jim Churchill, to the beautiful “wildflower borders” swaying in the wind at Harry’s Berries.

In between, the fascinating stories of the challenges and creative techniques used by Ventura County organic farmers fill the colorful, fact-filled pages of this heralded literature feat that includes rich detail on the battle of the bad bugs against the good. Yes, predatory mites, predatory beetles, predatory wasps and other predatory insects were used last year to target mealybugs, aphids, scale, mites, whitefly, psyllid, thrip, flies and more. And if you’re wondering, 9,251,320,750 “beneficials” (bugs) helped to biologically control pests on over 12,000 acres. Now that’s a lot of bugs!

Not to be outdone on pest management, one of this volume’s dozen short vignettes tells us about clever Bill Miller’s patented “Snail Jail,” a device he invented that stops the little buggers from climbing up his trees. An organic farmer and inventor, Bill says he is now “finished worrying about snails forever!” It isn’t just Bill that’s sleeping better, the commitment and care for the environment and our health expressed by the organic



farmers in this real page-turner gives us comfort that what’s good for the earth is good for us.

Indeed it isn’t every day one finds such depth and true grit in a government report, but Ventura County’s 2018 Crop report is a real standout. This annual report, released earlier than ever, is the work of Ventura County’s new Agricultural Commissioner Ed Williams, Deputy Commissioner Korinne Bell and the Department’s small but mighty staff. In the report’s prologue, Ed points out that **“Ventura County farms produced \$176,140,000 worth of the best Organic**

produce in the world.” We’re delighted to see the industry take off.

Included in this compendium on organic farming, is the philosophy of some of Ventura County’s best, like longtime organic farmer Phil McGrath who states in the report, *“Organic farming is not just whether you sprayed the crop with chemicals. It means a lot more. It’s about keeping the air, the water, the soil and all the environment cleaner...it’s working with nature.”* **SOAR thanks Ventura County’s organic farmers for meeting an essential need for our population while also being good stewards of the land.**

The 2018 Crop Report can be viewed at:
ventura.org/agricultural-commissioner/crop-reports/.



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PRESERVE SOAR'S LEGACY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

SOAR has been exploring a planned giving campaign. The goal is to encourage supporters of open space in Ventura County to remember SOAR in their estate planning so that our organization has the resources it needs to renew SOAR before it expires in 2050. Many of us fought hard to pass SOAR in 1998 and again in 2016. Raising the initial funding for the important 2050 campaign will likely be our final major contribution to our effort to "Protect Ventura County for Generations to Come."

To talk with us about how you can participate in this effort please contact SOAR board member Van Royce Vibber at (310) 883-4537 or email us at info@soarvc.org.

Meanwhile, your regular donations keep SOAR ready to respond to the next development threat, and continue to be one of the best investments you can make in the future of Ventura County.

Thank you for your support!

