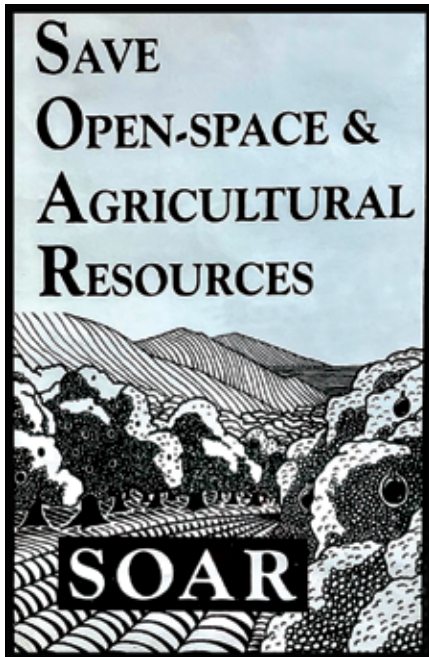


SPRING 2025



30 YEARS

OF SAVING OPEN-SPACE & AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

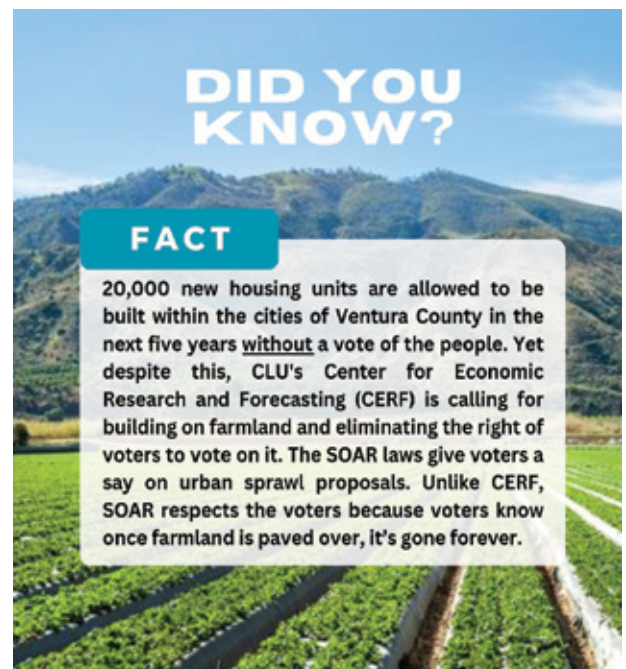
It's hard to believe 30 years have gone by since the first SOAR was enacted by voters in the city of Ventura. Like the SOAR initiatives that followed, it began with a bold vision and took passionate, hard-working volunteers and generous donors to succeed. Those grassroots efforts culminated in countywide SOAR laws which require voter approval to rezone open space and

farmland for urban development. How appropriate that the 30-year anniversary is symbolized by the pearl! Like a pearl, our years of hard work against the grit of difficult challenges turned into something we all treasure--the preservation of our open spaces. Enjoy first-hand perspectives on the origins of SOAR, from founders Richard Francis and Steve Bennett on page 2. ☆

THE NEXT BATTLE FOR SOAR?

One has to ask why a group out of Cal Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks is calling for building on Ventura County's farmland and preventing voters from having a say as required by SOAR. The Center for Economic Research and Forecasting (CERF) has gone from blaming SOAR for the economy to actively urging voters to change SOAR so SOAR-protected farmland can more easily be developed. CERF has taken their campaign against SOAR on the road, speaking before local groups and at house parties, likely paving the way for a 2026 ballot measure to weaken or eliminate SOAR.

It is always questionable when private institutions go political. The board and sponsors of CERF include representatives of the real estate industry, developers, and large agricultural landowners who stand to benefit from developing farmland. They know there is a lot of money to be made developing farmland. Indeed, it was a CLU economist who announced a few years back that a developer could make \$25 million for every hundred acres of farmland rezoned for urban use. ☆



FROM ONE, CAME MANY

BY RICHARD FRANCIS

In honor of our 30 years of existence as SOAR, let us have a quick history lesson!

Originating with the City of Ventura in 1995 as Save Our Agricultural Resources, the voters approved our city-wide initiative that protects lands in the city's General Plan designated as "Agriculture." Fast Forward to 1997, Linda Parks, an activist from the city of Thousand Oaks (and now SOAR's Executive Director) asked if we couldn't expand the concept to include Open Space and take the issue county-wide. She didn't know what she had wrought!

An initiative was drafted in 1998 to amend the Ventura County General Plan and for each city in the county (except for Port Hueneme and Ojai who have their own limitations). Nine separate initiatives that established lines I labeled City Urban Restriction Boundaries, or CURBs, using what cities previously agreed would be their ultimate city boundaries. Each city would be



constrained within their CURBs and wouldn't sprawl outside of those lines for urban uses. The County's initiative said that other than within certain urban enclaves (e.g., Thomas Aquinas

College, Oak View) the County would not establish urban uses, leaving urban growth to the cities. The initiative's name morphed to Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources, keeping the acronym SOAR. In 2016, we similarly ran nine new initiatives, running the concept out from 2020 out to 2050. We were thrilled to see voters approving the initiatives by 70% or more. With some exemptions, for example for farmworker housing and food processing facilities, we have maintained the small County atmosphere here for 30 years! ☆

TURNING THE TABLES ON URBAN SPRAWL

BY STEVE BENNETT

Looking back to the beginning of SOAR, I find one of the most rewarding aspects of the initial campaign was switching from playing defense to playing offense. Trying to stop each inappropriate urban sprawl project was destined to ultimately fail. Citizens of the San Fernando Valley sadly learned that.

The development of farmland and open space buffers was in overdrive in the 1990s. Grassroots volunteers could not match the energy of well-paid developers at endless planning commission hearings, etc. But we knew citizens will mobilize for an occasional big fight if the results will be significant gains. SOAR allowed us to fight one major political battle. If we won, developers of farmland would have to come to the citizens for voter approval. We were able to turn the tables on the influential development industry by empowering voters.

So much rode on the success of that first SOAR campaign in 1995. Had we lost, our momentum to take SOAR countywide would have been gone. Our opponents far outspent us and used a highly deceptive campaign to attack SOAR. One of their ads in the 1995 campaign featured thugs with guns sticking out of their belts. It claimed SOAR would increase crime. Deceptive campaigns from our opponents continued. On the eve of the 1998 countywide SOAR campaign, opponents plastered freeway ramps with signs falsely claiming SOAR increases your taxes. But the citizens weren't fooled. SOAR won and its public support solidified. That's why we were successful in re-upping SOAR during the 2016 campaign, in spite of more heavy opposition from the development industry. ☆

ORCHARDS TO HOUSES?

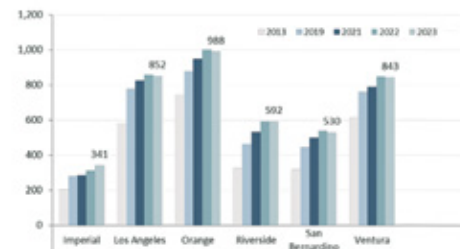
CITY OF VENTURA VOTERS MAY DECIDE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

One of Ventura County's largest agricultural businesses is looking at turning another of its holdings into housing tracts. Limoneira announced in March that it is considering asking voters to approve developing the 224-acre Limco Del Mar farm. Developing farmland in the city of Ventura requires the approval of city voters. Limoneira's CEO, Harold Edwards, successfully brought a previous proposal to voters in the city of Santa Paula. The approval of the "Harvest at Limoneira" housing project in Santa Paula was one of the six times developers successfully garnered the SOAR-required voter support for their projects. Overall, of the eleven times projects have come to a vote under SOAR, six were successful and five were rejected by voters.

While more information will be forthcoming on the Limco Del Mar proposal, Mr. Edwards recently told the Ventura County Star that he understands that with SOAR, you need to sweeten the pot to get the voters to approve your projects. As he stated, "There's not a lot of confidence for outsiders to win a SOAR vote... You have to create something the community wants, so the benefits outweigh the costs." Mr. Edwards was a major funder of the campaign against the 2016 extension of the SOAR laws, funding \$49,999 from Limoneira and \$25,000 from its subsidiary, Limco Del Mar. If he decides to bring his Limco Del Mar proposal to the voters of the city of Ventura, it would be in accordance with the SOAR law, and far more constructive than working to eliminate the SOAR laws as he did in 2016. Whether Ventura voters will vote yes or no on the Limco Del Mar proposal, bringing it to the voters is what SOAR is all about. ☆

How Does Ventura County's Housing Economics Compare with Other Southern California Counties?

Median home values in thousands of 2024 (US dollars)



Percent of households cost-burdened



Percent of households living in overcrowded units (1+ persons per room)



Source: American Community Survey 2023 1-Year Estimates
Post-Pandemic Housing and Economic Trends in Southern California
September 2024, SCAG, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy.

30 YEARS OF GRATEFULNESS

With SOAR's 30th anniversary upon us, it's a time to be grateful. **Grateful** that so many volunteers stepped forward early and contributed the best of their talents and resources. **Grateful** that we are the only county in Southern California to have stopped rampant urban sprawl. **Grateful** for less traffic congestion and cleaner air.

Grateful our economy is diversified with a healthy agricultural industry. **Grateful** that our city's separate and unique identities are maintained by our open space buffers. And finally, **grateful** we found a way to work positively, together, to protect a core value that our local elected leaders were not doing. ☆





SOAR Nonprofit, P.O. Box 7272, Ventura, CA 93006

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

This newsletter is made of material from well-managed FSC®-certified forests, recycled materials, vegetable-based inks and other controlled sources.



30TH GALA ANNIVERSARY

Join us October 5, 2025 for a beautiful sunset soirée on Ventura's scenic coast celebrating SOAR's 30th anniversary. Put on your pearls and be ready to be inspired as we gather to celebrate and re-energize to keep SOAR strong. Please consider being a sponsor. Invites for this limited seated event will be sent out this summer.

To sponsor, please go to SOARvc.org/Gala
or email LindaParks@soarvc.org or call (805) 497-0450.