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Tierra Miguel farm to remain pesticide-free

By: KIMBERLY LAMKE - Staff Writer

PAUMA VALLEY -- For the first time in Southern California history, federal and state conservation agencies have joined with two local groups to fund the purchase of an 85-acre farm and preserve it for agricultural use forever.

The \$1.9 million being spent on the Tierra Miguel Foundation Farm will purchase the title to the land and development rights on the property, ensuring it will not be developed in any way.

Bucolic doesn't do justice to the site. Surrounded by towering hillsides covered in brush and groves, rows of corn and branches of fruit trees of numerous varieties swayed in the breeze behind a podium of proud supporters during a ceremony Friday.

Standing among the greenhouses and the herbs, most would never guess that rows of houses threatened to overtake the agrarian utopia.

The land serves not only as an educational demonstration farm, but also supplies organic produce to more than 300 people throughout Southern California who pay a subscription fee. Endless varieties of fruits, vegetables and herbs are grown using what volunteers call, "cutting edge organic farming techniques."

Landowner Bill Potter summed up the preservation thusly: "Vision has driven everything in my life," Potter said. "But there's no way in heck I could have every envisioned all of this."

Potter purchased the property in 1986 and said he intended to sell the land to a housing developer. Changes in the housing market drove Potter to postpone that sale and farm the land.

He was about to consider selling the land again when he was approached by the Tierra Miguel Foundation about buying it and keeping a farm on the site permanently.

The foundation applied to the California Farmland Conservancy Program for funding to purchase the title to the land and received money from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program to purchase the development rights.

"We want to keep rural farmlands in Pauma Valley, north San Diego County and across California, if at all possible," said Charlene Orszag, president of the Tierra Miguel Foundation. "We're so excited that we get to do that today."

The Fallbrook Land Conservancy holds the easement to ensure that no development will take place.

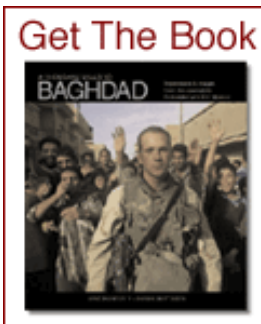
"This partnership is really the first step in many steps for protecting one of our most valuable resources," Wallace Tucker said. "We love this project. Ever since we formed the land conservancy in 1988 we've been looking for a land conservation project like this."

Darryl Young, director of the California Department of Conservation, was on hand for a ceremonial signing

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of the documents preserving the farm.

"This project was chosen for funding for many reasons," Young said. "The soil is of sufficient quality for sustainable farming and the land has a reliable water source. But more importantly, the support from the community is there. The enthusiasm of the people involved in this is infectious. The people factor is what makes this project successful."

Approximately \$1.68 million will be lent by the state and \$232,750 will come from the federal government to pay for the development right, officials said. The foundation will seek donations and grants to repay the state.

"We support the farm," said Anne Schloesser, a Valley Center resident who brought her 5-year-old daughter Amelia to Friday's event. "We love the vegetables. They grow the purest, best source of food I know of here. But we also like coming to visit the people who work here. They're just as great."

For more information about the Tierra Miguel Foundation Farm or any of the programs offered by the foundation, call (760) 742-1151.

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