

Congressman Mike Thompson

Representing California's 1st Congressional District

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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REP. MIKE THOMPSON INTRODUCES BILL TO CONSERVE AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND OPEN SPACES

251 Representatives support making the conservation easement incentive permanent

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressmen Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Jim Gerlach (R-PA) introduced the Conservation Easement Incentive Act, landmark legislation that would provide family farmers, ranchers, and other moderate-income landowners with a permanent incentive to donate development rights to their land. By providing tax benefits to landowners who choose conservation, the bill would help preserve our nation's cherished farm lands and open spaces for future generations. The bill has received broad bipartisan support in the House of Representatives, with 251 original co-sponsors.

Under Congressmen Thompson and Gerlach's bill, landowners who donate a conservation easement would maintain ownership and management of the land, but forgo their rights to develop the land in the future. The Conservation Easement Incentive Act would make permanent a tax incentive for donating development rights that will otherwise expire at the end of 2011. Eliminating this ever-changing deadline will give more farmers, ranchers, and forest owners the assurance they need to choose land conservation over development.

"Tax incentives can be a powerful tool to help green our economy and protect our natural resources," said Rep. Thompson. **"Conservation easements have been particularly effective, encouraging landowners to conserve millions of acres of farm lands and scenic open spaces. By making this important conservation tool permanent, my bill would help preserve even more land for future generations."**

"The Northcoast Regional Land Trust is thankful that Congressman Thompson is leading the charge to save this important conservation tool," said Lindsay Magnuson, Executive Director of the Northcoast Regional Land Trust. **"We have seen firsthand the dramatic impact that the incentive has had in helping landowners voluntarily and permanently conserve farmlands, wildlife habitat and open space in Northern California and across the nation."**

"This conservation easement tax incentive helps to facilitate continued ranching and timber activities on rural and potentially developable land," said Ross Burgess, a fourth generation rancher who donated a 1,131-acre working ranch and forest

conservation easement in Trinity County to the Northcoast Regional Land Trust in 2008. **“It is one of the very important tools that can be used to ensure continued ranch ownership across generations. The tax deduction made a donated easement economically possible and provided the incentive to move forward with the project.”**

Specifically, the Conservation Easement Incentive Act would help landowners of modest means choose conservation by:

- Raising the maximum deduction a donor can take for donating a conservation easement from 30% of their adjusted gross income (AGI) in any year to 50%;
- Allowing qualified farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their AGI; and
- Increasing the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years.

The Conservation Easement Incentive Act has been endorsed by the Land Trust Alliance, Ducks Unlimited, National Wildlife Federation, National Cattleman’s Beef Association, American Forest Foundation, Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, and over fifty other groups. The bill is also strongly supported by the Northcoast Regional Land Trust (NRLT), which works with landowners on a voluntary basis to promote stewardship of Northern California’s healthy and productive resource base, natural systems and quality of life. Since 2000, the NRLT has worked to conserve over 15,000 acres of ranch, farm, and timber land, including projects under the Six Rivers to the Sea Initiative, eliminating future subdivision and development while protecting natural resources and compatible agricultural uses.

Congressman Mike Thompson is proud to represent California’s 1st Congressional District, which includes Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, and portions of Sonoma and Yolo counties. He is a senior member of the House Ways and Means Committee and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Rep. Thompson is also a member of the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition and Co-Chair of the bipartisan, bicameral Congressional Wine Caucus.

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