

Joint Statement from Save North Livermore Valley, Friends of Livermore & Friends of Open Space & Vineyards re Solar Power Plants on Alameda County Agricultural Land

North Livermore Valley has been saved as an agricultural community with stunning views of pasturelands, rolling hills and distant mountains. Since the 1950s, the North Livermore Valley has been zoned for agricultural and rural residential uses. For nearly the same period, Alameda County has recognized North Livermore Avenue in its General Plan as a scenic corridor and sought to preserve the area's outstanding scenic quality. In 2000, Alameda County voters approved Measure D which established an urban growth boundary to prevent sprawl from encroaching on the rural areas of east Alameda County, including North Livermore Valley. Countless persons and organizations spanning decades have fought to preserve the agricultural land, open space, watershed and wildlife habitats, and scenic beauty of North Livermore Valley. Their work and inspiring success is now at risk from two proposed industrial solar power plants. The plants would dramatically and permanently alter a massive section of North Livermore Valley from open ranch and farmland into an industrial use - the commercial generation of electricity for sale to California's energy grid. The alteration would gravely undermine Measure D.

Furthermore, if approved, the two projects would create the precedent that solar power plants qualify as appropriate use of agricultural land in all Alameda County. Over the next 10-15 years, the scarce remaining agricultural land in Alameda County could be lost forever.

We call on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors to place a moratorium on the review of new solar power plants on agricultural land until the County completes a comprehensive study and mapping project to identify the appropriate siting, scale and operations of solar power plants, if any, on agricultural land, and incorporate the study findings in a solar ordinance and General Plan Amendment. Likewise, the East County Board of Zoning Adjustments should defer review of any individual proposed utility-scale solar facilities on agricultural land until this work is completed.

We look forward to offering our input and participating with County staff in identifying the most efficient and environmentally sound ways to generate greater renewable energy in harmony with Measure D and other relevant standards and policies for rural areas.

Santa Clara County adopted a policy for utility-scale solar power plants on agricultural land in 2010. Contra Costa County did the same earlier this year. Without its own solar policy, Alameda County is needlessly pitting the preservation of agricultural land and open space against expanding renewable energy.