

Congressman Mike Thompson

Representing California's 1st Congressional
District

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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.”**

“Congressman Mike Thompson is a national champion for land protection and the preservation of our natural resources,” said Joel Tranmer, CEO of the Land Trust of Napa County. **“His tireless efforts to make conservation tax incentives permanent have been critical to the conservation movement in this country. These benefits are helping the Land Trust of Napa County to permanently protect vineyard lands, family farms and scenic open space.”**

“The Conservation Easement Incentive Act has provided the incentive for preserving a national treasure, the vineyards of the Napa Valley, and helped keep family farmers on the land,” said Andy Beckstoffer, owner of the largest independent family-owned vineyard company on California's North Coast. **“This movement has just begun and the Conservation Easement Incentive Act of 2011 will allow it to continue.”**

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 Land Trust of Napa County, a community-based nonprofit dedicated to preserving the character of Napa by permanently protecting land. Established in 1976 by seven founding members, today the Land Trust has 1,700 active members and supporters. In its 35-year history, the Land Trust has completed over 150 projects, protecting more than 53,000 acres of land, approximately 10% of Napa County.

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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