

The SOAR Initiative: Measure C



There are two measures on the November ballot dealing with SOAR, the law that protects Ventura County from urban sprawl.

Measure C was written and is funded by the supporters of SOAR, a grassroots coalition that is working to extend SOAR and preserve open space and farmland in the County. Measure F was written and is funded by opponents of SOAR, big landholders and wealthy developers who want to weaken our protections.

SOAR has a proven 20-year track record of effectively protecting open space and agricultural land from development and maintaining the local agricultural economy and jobs. The key to the effectiveness of SOAR is the fact that land zoned for open space and agriculture cannot be rezoned for development without a vote of the people.

The single most important and fundamental difference between SOAR's Measure C and the opponent's Measure F is the degree to which they empower the voters to block urban sprawl projects.

Measure C requires a vote of the people before virtually all land zoned open space and agricultural can be rezoned for development. This makes it impossible for politicians, developers and special interests to push through a major project that is opposed by the public.

In contrast, Measure F contains vaguely worded loopholes that hide the agenda of the developers and other SOAR opponents who are funding the campaign. Measure F's loopholes will allow the conversion of thousands of acres of open space and agricultural land into urban development without a vote of the people. For example, Measure F allows development of farmland "adjacent" to schools without a vote of the people, with no limits on the size of the exemption. Measure F's backers have admitted in public meetings that they do not know how large an area this loophole applies to. They say it will be determined by local politicians in the future – the same type of politicians who utterly failed to protect open space and agricultural land across the rest of Southern California.



Measure C trusts that voters will get it right when an exception needs to be made. Measure F does not. Besides exempting thousands of acres of land from a vote of the people, opponents of SOAR limit the extension of the right to vote to only 16 years after the current SOAR expires.

By contrast, Measure C ensures the right to vote until 2050, similar to Napa County where in 2008 citizens elected to extend their right to vote for 50 years until 2058. Measure C does not lock in old land use policies until 2050 as opponents claim. Instead it locks in your right to vote on changes to those policies until 2050. SOAR's Measure C keeps politicians and developers more responsive to the public and more focused on long-term investments to keep agriculture profitable rather than on short-term land speculation. How strong or weak the people's right to vote will be is the major difference between Measure C and Measure F.

A second important difference concerns the coordination of land use policies in Ventura County. SOAR is a coordinated plan with voter-approved City and County initiatives that work together to protect our open spaces. Voters who support their City SOAR initiative should also support the county SOAR Measure C to continue this valuable coordination of land use policies. Measure F is not coordinated with the city SOAR measures. It breaks that coordinated approach between county and city land use planning efforts, making it harder for local voters to protect their communities from piecemeal urban sprawl.



The inconsistency of land use policies across multiple jurisdictions was a major contributor to the urban sprawl that dominates the San Fernando Valley. If the various land use initiatives across Ventura County end up with inconsistent expiration dates, developers will have a field day working the system. The coordinated SOAR land use policies that have served our county well for the last 20 years, and that have made Ventura County a leader in Southern California and the nation in stopping sprawl development, will be shattered. The best way to ensure coordinated city and county SOAR protection is to vote Yes on your city's SOAR and on Measure C, and vote No on Measure F. Voting for both Measure C and Measure F does not work because Measure F also contains poison pill language (see Section 5) that would nullify SOAR's Measure C protections even if Measure C passes. Measure C does not contain this poison pill provision.

Measure F's language about water infrastructure is designed to imply SOAR does not support keeping farming profitable in Ventura County. Water is a complicated issue but it is important to note that legally there is nothing that can be done differently with water infrastructure under Measure F that cannot also be done under Measure C.

Measure C's support for local food processing with a 12-acre exception is right-sized for Ventura County because most food processing activities are already allowed on land zoned for agriculture. The 12-acre exception accommodates the few activities that are restricted, such as cooking.

After 20 years of SOAR protection, the value of agricultural land and agricultural production has steadily climbed to record levels. Now when a farm operation ends another farm operation quickly takes over, showing the high demand for farmland and the resiliency of farming in Ventura County. Twenty years ago opponents of SOAR predicted catastrophe for agriculture if SOAR passed. They were wrong then and are wrong now. The real issue here is how much the people of Ventura County will be empowered to protect our county from the greatest threat to agriculture: the loss of highly profitable agricultural land to the kind of piecemeal urban sprawl projects that ended highly profitable agriculture in Orange County and the rest of Southern California.

Measure C strongly empowers the voters. Measure F weakens their voice.