During the last year farmers and ranchers are beginning to see some promising trends in terms of affordability because: a. the Farm Bill has brought historically low interest rates coupled with increase loan limits; and b. land prices have begun to stabilize or decrease in many areas. Still, these factors may not be enough and those seeking to buy land will continue to seek out innovative options. Not long ago a farmer seeking to purchase land could look forward to a “fair fight” consisting of bidding against another farmer famous similar production goals and marketing constraints. More recently farmers' competition for land has morphed from other farmers to include residential developers, estate home buyers and others. While conservation easements are a key tool for addressing these challenges they do not resolve all of the challenges over time and may not allow a landowner to meet all of their goals. How can we ensure protected land remains affordable during an intergenerational farm transition? What if local zoning does not make a traditional conservation easement a viable option?

We will discuss: strategies for leveraging funding including low-interest Farm Service Agency loans; conservation easements as a tool in financing farm purchases; and finally an innovative “Transfer of Farming Rights” concept.

We'll consider how conservation easements can be used to ensure affordability of a farm for a beginning farmer. We'll look at a sweat-equity model that can be used, for example, to help a farmworker position themselves to buy a farm. Finally, we'll look at a landowner who sold a property while retaining the farming rights and discuss how this has promise as a tool for securing tenure and appreciating asset for farmers and ranchers of limited means.

The Farmers’ Guide to Securing Land, available through California FarmLink at (707) 829-1691.