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Seal the deal to buy coast ranch

Mercury News Editorial

For two years, the Peninsula Open Space Trust has repeatedly tried to get the federal government to take 4,200 acres of spectacular San Mateo County coast land off its hands.

At \$15 million, the land is a steal. Yet Congress has let an argument over 232 acres of pumpkins and fava beans keep it from closing the deal.

Rancho Corral de Tierra, a magnificent property just north of Half Moon Bay, was purchased by the trust for \$29 million with the intent of turning it over to the National Park Service. POST raised half the money from private and state sources, and hoped that the feds would put up the rest.

Legislation adding the property to the adjacent Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the first step in acquiring federal money, was passed by the Senate, but it stalled in a House subcommittee.

Although the White House is reluctant to acquire more park land because of the cost of maintaining it, the administration hasn't opposed the bill. Clearly Rancho Corral de Tierra is a special case. This is a rare opportunity to acquire valuable land, close to a metropolitan area, with hiking trails and stunning vistas, at a bargain price.

The bill is being held up by Rep. George Radanovich, a Central Valley Republican who chairs the National Parks Subcommittee, because of opposition from the California Farm Bureau Federation. The farm bureau doesn't want 232 acres of vegetable farms on the property to become part of a national park, fearing the farmers would eventually be run off.

But the farm bureau need not be concerned. The proponents of the bill want to protect the land from condos, not crops. Their plan is to sell the land to the tenant farmers, allowing them to stay as long as they like.

Congress must recognize that this proposal is not only good for farmers, it's also good for plants, wildlife, hikers, the federal government and anyone who just wants to enjoy the view. The farm bureau should be grateful to POST for acquiring this land. Otherwise, farmers would be just another endangered species in the path of the bulldozers.

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