

Growers join forces to reserve land for farming

The Associated Press

MADERA — When grape and almond grower Denis Proseri bought 40 acres of farmland adjacent to the city limit a few years ago, he did so with the intention of developing it.

But when he tried to get the land annexed by the city of Madera, near Fresno, he drew the ire of neighboring growers and they quickly circulated a petition against his proposal.

Now Proseri and his neighbors have joined to permanently reserve their land for farming through a conservation easement. The easement allows growers to receive tax breaks or a cash payment, if they keep the land in farming.

“We could have sold it to housing developers and we could have all ended up with more money,” said Proseri, looking across a vineyard to a row of red-pitch roofed houses in the distance. “But this was an alternative that was less painful.”

Through the deal announced Wednesday, Proseri and seven growers have placed about 440 acres in an easement, creating what farmland preservationists have dubbed a “farmland security perimeter” against encroaching development.

It is the largest group of adjacent landowners to have placed their holdings in an easement in the western United States, said the American Farmland Trust.

