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**March 27, 2006**

Vacaville, CA

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Article Launched: 03/25/2006 7:48 AM PST

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## This politician offers ideas for farms' survival

By Catherine Moy

Jim Spering stood in a vacant fruit stand on Abernathy Road in Suisun Valley. It was mid-morning on Tuesday and Suisun City's mayor had come to listen to the concerns of Solano County farmers. About 30 farmers and ranchers took a break from their labor and showed up in their Ford and Chevrolet pickups. They were ready to talk.

Spering, who is a candidate for the Solano County Board of Supervisors, told the folks that he needed to learn from the people who work the land in Solano County; the people who now struggle to survive on land that, for some, has been their family's sole source of income for generations.

What was most striking about the meeting was that farmers are a tiny group of the population who can vote in the upcoming election. Most of the voters in the third supervisorial district live in the cities where crime and transportation are the most important issues.

So Spering spent some of his precious campaigning time to help people who may have little sway in the election. It is a move that a slick campaign adviser might pooh-poo. A smarter use of time might come at a popular crab feed or business meeting where the well-connected rub elbows and trade checks.

It is a move that has endured Spering to me. And that is tough. I am generally skeptical of politicians.

City folk do not care much about the plight of farmers as long as they can buy pre-washed lettuce and apples at the supermarket. Some of this is understandable.

We have to make sure that our homes are safe, our schools are working and our kids can play at the park without us worrying about a kidnapping or molestation. Who cares about where food comes from? We can just go to a fast-food restaurant drive-through, right?

Suisun Valley farmers are not unique in their troubles. Foreign competition from countries without strict pesticide and labor rules sell their produce cheap enough to hurt many in the agricultural industries. But Suisun Valley has unique problems.

Politicians here think farmers can survive, but do not offer ideas. Some say the farmers can flourish by putting their land in Williamson Act protection, which cuts taxes for working farms. How is that supposed to help them make money on crops?

Because Suisun Valley is so incredibly stunning in its landscape, some politicians want to preserve it as open space. They do not really care if the farmers can plant beets or corn or wheat and make a profit. It is pretty enough fallow.

That is why you see politicians, such as Spering's opponent, former Fairfield Mayor Karin MacMillian, promising to help protect farms and open space. For what? Little green frogs and fairy shrimp?

Spering thinks differently. He does not pretend to know the answers, but he will work hard looking for solutions.

Spering is a man who listened to a minority, a group of people - farmers - who are struggling. There is no better politician than one who leads with brains and listens with compassion. Spering is that kind of man.

*The author, a lifelong Fairfield resident, can be reached at [Poooho@aol.com](mailto:Poooho@aol.com).*

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