

Measure A and Voter Choice: Rethinking Parks and Agriculture Funding in Marin

June 30, 2026

SUMMARY

Measure A, a voter-approved quarter-cent sales tax, has become one of Marin County's most important sources of funding for parks, open space, and sustainable agriculture. Today, Measure A provides approximately half of Marin County Parks' funding, and the department would look fundamentally different without it. In this report, we reach two conclusions regarding the future of Measure A.¹

First, Marin County Parks should receive greater flexibility and authority over the use of Measure A funds. Interviews, public reports, and documents reviewed during this investigation demonstrated that Marin County Parks has administered these funds successfully and enjoys broad public confidence. However, the structure of Measure A reflects priorities from when the measure was first adopted in 2012, and its renewal in 2022, while retaining allocation formulas that limit flexibility over time. Over the past 14 years, Marin County Parks has shifted focus away from land acquisition and expansion, and toward stewardship, maintenance, and wildfire resilience.

The current structure of the measure, which reserves a fixed share of money (15 percent) for distribution among 19 different cities, towns, and special districts, may be limiting. While the local projects this money supports provide public benefits, the structure of splitting resources into small slices of funds may prevent Marin County Parks from pursuing larger countywide objectives that could benefit multiple communities. Future versions of Measure A could eliminate the 15 percent earmark, which would provide Parks with greater discretion to allocate funding based on professional judgment and local needs.

Second, future Measure A renewals should allow voters to consider sustainable agriculture funding separately from parks and open space funding. Many California counties have ballot measures² to establish taxes that support parks and open space, but Measure A currently

¹ Marin County Parks Annual Report 2024-2025, available at: <https://data.marincounty.gov/stories/s/Parks-Annual-Report-FY-2024-2025/2vq7-4z2e/>

² See, e.g.: Sonoma County Measure M, a 1/8 cent sales tax passed by voters in 2018, available at: <https://www.srcity.org/3199/Measure-M---Parks-for-All>.

Los Angeles County Measure A, a 1.5 cent per built square foot parcel tax passed by voters in 2016: https://ballotpedia.org/Los_Angeles_County%2C_California%2C_Parks_and_Open_Space_Parcel_Tax%2C_Measure_A_%28November_2016%29.

Santa Clara County Measure T, a \$24-per-parcel tax re-authorized by voters in 2020: [https://ballotpedia.org/Santa_Clara_Valley_Open_Space_Authority,_California,_Measure_T,_Parcel_Tax_\(November_2020\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Santa_Clara_Valley_Open_Space_Authority,_California,_Measure_T,_Parcel_Tax_(November_2020))

Napa County Measure K, a proposed quarter-cent sales tax for parks and open space, which failed to reach the required threshold of two-thirds of voters in 2020:

combines parks funding with agricultural programs on private land that do not typically receive funding from local sales taxes. These programs include paying landowners for conservation easements, stewardship and infrastructure work on private land, and food system grants and initiatives for small nonprofits. These programs serve different purposes, benefit different constituencies, and reflect distinct policy choices.

Furthermore, the need for conservation easements has been reduced because so much Marin agricultural land is already covered. Conservation easements now protect nearly 59,000 acres³, representing about half of all privately owned agricultural land in Marin County.

Marin County voters have repeatedly demonstrated strong support for parks and open space funding, approving both the original 2012 Measure A and its 2022 renewal by substantial margins. The Grand Jury found no evidence for a comparable voter mandate regarding the appropriate level of public funding for agricultural conservation easements, stewardship activities on private lands, agricultural infrastructure projects, or community-based food and environmental programs.⁴ Public debate surrounding Marin’s agricultural easements has continued for several years, and the 2022 renewal debate demonstrated that some residents supported continued parks funding, while expressing differing views regarding these other expenditures.⁵

BACKGROUND

Overview of Measure A

Marin County’s Measure A is a voter-approved, one-quarter cent (0.25 percent) sales tax on goods and services purchased within the county. The measure was first approved by voters in 2012 and renewed in 2022. While the original 2012 Measure A and the 2022 version of Measure A vary slightly in their funding allocations, they have similar structure and similar purposes.

In the Fiscal Year 2024-25, Measure A generated about \$17.7 million in sales tax revenue for parks, open spaces, and agriculture programs in Marin County.⁶ The measure allocates funds

https://ballotpedia.org/Napa_County%2C_California%2C_Measure_K%2C_Sales_Tax_for_Water%2C_Parks%2C_and_Open_Space_Preservation_%28March_2020%29

³ Lily Verdone, MALT Executive Director, “How Public and Private Dollars Come Together to Protect Marin Farmland,” 5/20/2026. Available at: <https://malt.org/land-protection/public-private-funding-marin-farmland/>. See also, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, “Farmland Protection,” available at: <https://malt.org/farmland-protection/>.

⁴ See, e.g., Richard Halstead, “Marin factions await fate of controversial parks tax measure,” *Marin Independent Journal*, May 7, 2022. Available at: <https://www.marinij.com/2022/05/07/marin-factions-await-fate-of-controversial-parks-tax-measure/>.

⁵ See, e.g., Martin Griffin and Barry Spitz, “Marin Voice: Voters deserve transparency on Measure A renewal,” *Marin Independent Journal*, Sept. 20, 2021. Accessed 5/29/2026 at: <https://www.marinij.com/2021/09/20/marin-voice-malts-involvement-threatens-funding-renewal-for-measure-a/>.

⁶ Independent Auditor’s Report, Marin County Parks, available at: <https://parks.marincounty.gov/sites/parks/files/2026-02/Marin%20County%20Parks%20Measure%20A%202025%20Final.pdf>

across three main areas: Marin County Parks, local park and recreation funds administered by cities and special districts, and sustainable agriculture programs.

Most Measure A funds are administered by Marin County Parks, which is responsible for implementing programs, distributing Food, Agriculture, and Resilient Ecosystems (FARE) grants, and overseeing conservation-related expenditures such as agricultural easements.

Allocation Structure of Measure A

The measure includes specific allocation formulas directing how funds are distributed. Currently, Measure A funds are allocated to:

- 65 percent — to Marin County Parks for countywide park, open space, and recreation programs.
- 15 percent — to cities and special districts for local park and recreation purposes.
- 20 percent — to sustainable agriculture programs.

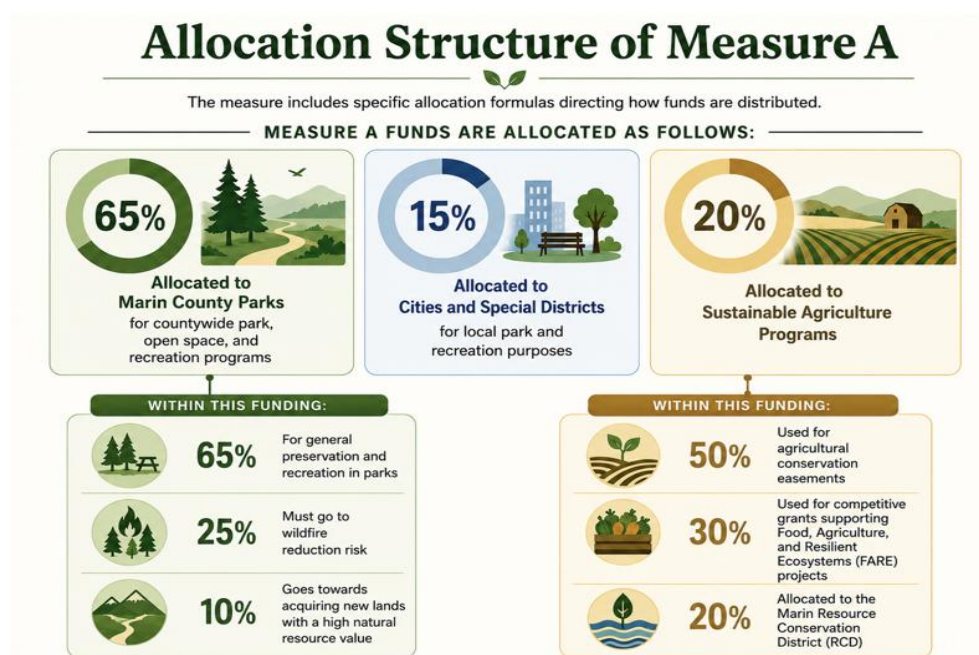
Within each allocation, there are additional specifications. Out of the funding portion directed to County Parks, for instance:

- 65 percent is for general preservation and recreation in parks.
- 25 percent must go to wildfire reduction risk.
- 10 percent goes towards acquiring new lands with value to the public.

Within the sustainable agriculture funding:

- 50 percent is used for agricultural conservation easements.
- 30 percent is used for competitive grants supporting Food, Agriculture, and Resilient Ecosystems (FARE) projects.
- 20 percent is allocated to the Marin Resource Conservation District (MRCD).

Graphic 1: Allocation structure of Measure A



Source: [Marin County Ordinance No. 3760](#). Chart created by the Grand Jury.

Agricultural conservation easements typically involve payments to landowners to restrict development on privately owned land, generally in perpetuity, in order to preserve agricultural use and open space.

Measure A Voter Approval History

Because Measure A funding represents approximately 50 percent of Marin County Parks' budget, the department's operations, maintenance, and long-term planning would be fundamentally different without it. While Measure A funds a variety of endeavors, voters who support Measure A see it primarily as a vote in favor of having large, high-quality, and well-maintained parks in Marin County.⁷

Measure A has received strong and consistent support from Marin County voters. In 2012, the measure was approved by approximately 74 percent of voters. In 2022, voters approved renewal of the measure with around 75 percent support.

Both the 2012 and 2022 votes on Measure A exceeded the two-thirds majority required for local tax measures placed on the ballot by elected officials. The level of voter support in both elections indicates broad public support for the purposes described in the measure, especially funding for parks and open space programs.

Because Measure A is presented to voters as a single ballot measure encompassing multiple funding categories, voter approval applies to the measure as a whole, rather than to any individual program or allocation. Voters are not given the option to separately approve or reject components of the measure.

Program Types Within Sustainable Agriculture

Agricultural Conservation Easements

Agricultural conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements that permanently restrict non-agricultural development on private land in order to preserve agricultural use, open space, and rural character. Under Measure A, easement funding has primarily supported the acquisition of development rights on farmland and ranchland through partnerships with the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT). While ownership of the land remains private, the easement limits future subdivision or conversion to non-agricultural uses.

Competitive Grants (FARE)

The Food, Agriculture, and Resilient Ecosystems (FARE) program was introduced as part of the 2022 Measure A renewal to expand support beyond land conservation alone. The program provides competitive grants that support "sustainable food systems, climate-beneficial

⁷ <https://www.marinij.com/2022/05/07/marin-factions-await-fate-of-controversial-parks-tax-measure/>

management, and improving natural resource values on Marin’s working lands,” according to Marin County Parks.⁸

Marin Resource Conservation District

The Marin Resource Conservation District (Marin RCD) is a public agency that works with agricultural operators, landowners, and government entities on conservation and land stewardship initiatives.⁹ Under the renewed Measure A, Marin RCD receives around \$640,000 annually dedicated funding to support technical assistance, habitat restoration, water-quality projects, erosion control, wildfire resilience, and sustainable agricultural practices throughout Marin County.¹⁰

Public Input Process During the 2022 Renewal

In advance of the 2022 renewal of Measure A, aspects of the sustainable agriculture funding structure were the subject of public debate and review. News reporting¹¹, as well as a 2024 Grand Jury report¹², raised concerns particularly that the agricultural easements were being given out to a small group of landowners with significant conflicts of interest.

Public commentary, including opinion pieces, questioned whether spending public funds on easements that went to private landowners appropriately reflected public priorities.¹³

After a process of gathering public feedback led by Marin County Parks, Measure A was changed significantly. The amount of funds going to agricultural conservation easements was cut

⁸ “FARE Grants,” Marin County Parks, available at: <https://parks.marincounty.gov/projectsplans/fare-grants>.

⁹ “About Us,” Marin Resource Conservation District, available at: <https://www.marinrcd.org/about-us>.

¹⁰ “Marin County Measure A and Marin RCD,” available at: <https://www.marinrcd.org/marin-county-measure-a-and-marin-rcd>.

¹¹ Peter Byrne, MALT Board of Directors’ Conflicts of Interest Exposed as Legal Battle Unfolds, Pacific Sun, Oct 1, 2020, available at: <https://pacificsun.com/malt-board-of-directors-conflicts-of-interest-exposed-as-legal-battle-unfolds/>.

Anna Guth, “Conflicts of interest afflict MALT,” Pt. Reyes Light, October 28, 2020, available at: <https://www.ptreyeslight.com/news/conflicts-interest-afflict-malt/>.

¹² See Marin County Grand Jury 2023-24, “Spending Public Money to Preserve Marin’s Agricultural Heritage: Is Anyone Watching?,” available at: <https://www.marincounty.gov/departments/grand-jury/civil-grand-jury-reports/2023-2024-civil-grand-jury-reports/spending-public-money-preserve-marins-agricultural-heritage-anyone-watching>.

¹³ See, e.g., Ike Allen, “Measure A Overcomes Ag Opponents,” Point Reyes Light, June 15, 2022, available at: <https://www.marinrcd.org/files/d91ff5410/Measure-A-overcomes-ag-opponents-Point-Reyes-Light.pdf>. Martin Griffin and Barry Spitz, “Marin Voice: Voters deserve transparency on Measure A renewal,” Marin Independent Journal, Sept. 20, 2021, available at: <https://www.marinij.com/2021/09/20/marin-voice-malts-involvement-threatens-funding-renewal-for-measure-a/>.

Linda Rames, “Marin Voice: Measure A must bring back more fire prevention funding, cut MALT,” Marin Independent Journal, November 6, 2021, available at: <https://www.marinij.com/2021/11/06/marin-voice-measure-a-must-bring-back-fire-prevention-funding-cut-malt/>.

Dick Spotswood, “Measure A works if strict scrutiny of easements is guaranteed,” Marin Independent Journal, May 10, 2022, available at: <https://www.marinij.com/2022/05/10/dick-spotswood-measure-a-works-if-strict-scrutiny-of-easements-is-guaranteed/>.

by nearly 50 percent, while the amount going to Marin RCD was substantially increased, and the FARE grant program was created.

In Fiscal year ending 2025, \$2.48 million, 14 percent of total Measure A revenues, went to farmland preservation. This includes conservation easements run through MALT, representing 10 percent of all Measure A funds, and Marin RCD funding, representing 4 percent of total Measure A funds. Both of these segments exist within the “sustainable agriculture” segment of Measure A funding.

Role of Marin County Parks in Measure A

Marin County Parks plays a central role in the administration, coordination, and oversight of Measure A. In addition to managing the 65 percent portion of Measure A revenue directly allocated to parks, open space, and recreation programs, Marin County Parks also administers and oversees the measure’s sustainable agriculture funding.

This administrative role includes coordinating grant processes, managing funding allocations, monitoring program compliance, supporting reporting requirements, and working with partner organizations involved in conservation and agricultural programs. Marin County Parks also serves as a primary point of coordination between the County, oversight bodies, participating agencies, and external organizations receiving Measure A funds.

Because Measure A combines multiple funding categories within a single countywide measure, Marin County Parks functions not only as an operational department for parks and open space projects, but also as the key entity responsible for broader program implementation and fiscal stewardship across several Measure A program areas.

Based on interviews conducted by the Grand Jury, Marin County Parks appears to administer the FARE grant program and its broader Measure A responsibilities in an effective manner. Some interviewees suggested that restrictive requirements on Marin County Parks may be holding the county back from the best possible use of Measure A funds.

APPROACH

The Grand Jury’s investigation relied on interviews with stakeholders across local and county government, concerned Marin County residents, and key private organizations representing agricultural interests and environmental concerns. We reviewed past Grand Jury reports, annual reports and audits regarding Measure A and Marin County Parks priorities, and other public documents, as well as news articles. We observed public meetings, including Measure A Oversight Committee meetings.

DISCUSSION

Marin County Parks Should Receive Greater Authority and Flexibility

Measure A Reflects Earlier Priorities

Measure A has provided Marin County Parks with a stable and significant source of funding for more than a decade.

The structure of Measure A, however, locks the Parks Department into priorities that were established in 2012 and updated in 2022. Since the Measure's adoption in 2012, the Parks department has evolved its focus on land acquisition and expansion into one increasingly focused on stewardship, maintenance, wildfire resilience, and long-term sustainability.

Fixed Allocation Formulas Are Overly Limiting

Despite this evolution, Measure A directs funding through fixed percentages embedded within the ballot measure. For example, the measure prescribes specific percentages for wildfire prevention activities and land acquisition, regardless of year-to-year priorities and changes. Wildfire prevention was understandably “top of mind” for many residents when Marin County Parks was polling the public about Measure A priorities in 2021. However, Marin County Parks already did wildfire prevention work, and is more than capable of determining the year-to-year needs of this important task. In addition, in 2020, Marin County voters funded the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority, a new agency that collaborates with Marin County Parks as well as local fire departments.¹⁴

Rigid allocations formulas may not reflect current conditions, or the professional judgments of Park staff.

Fixed Allocations To Cities and Special Districts Fragment Planning

Measure A currently allocates 15 percent of total revenue to cities and special districts for local park and recreation purposes. In Fiscal Year 2024–25, \$2,648,613 in Measure A funds was distributed to the 19 cities, towns, and districts covered by Measure A, according to an application process spelled out by the Board of Supervisors.¹⁵

Although Marin County Parks already administers the allocation process for city, town, and special district Measure A grants, the current structure reserves a fixed percentage of funding for jurisdiction-specific distributions established at the ballot box level. The Measure's 15 percent support for local governments is based on an allocation formula and codified in grant

¹⁴ “Open Space Vegetation Management,” Marin County Parks, available at: <https://parks.marincounty.gov/projectsplans/vegetation-management>.

¹⁵ Measure A Annual Report FY 2024–25, available at: <https://data.marincounty.gov/stories/s/Parks-Annual-Report-FY-2024-2025/2vq7-4z2e/>.

agreements. This approach limits the department's ability to direct resources toward larger regional priorities and long-term countywide objectives.

The current allocation structure favors distributing smaller amounts of funding across many jurisdictions on a recurring basis, rather than concentrating resources on larger projects with broader regional impact. As a result, Measure A funding may be less available for long-term countywide priorities, like trail connectivity, wildfire resilience, or larger projects that could benefit multiple communities.

A more flexible structure for Measure A would preserve opportunities for local projects, while allowing Marin County Parks greater discretion to allocate funds based on regional needs or long-term planning.

Oversight Structures Can Be Streamlined & Made More Transparent

Measure A currently operates with a separate seven-member Measure A Oversight Committee that meets twice a year. This exists alongside the existing Parks and Open Space Commission, a seven-member commission that meets six times per year.

Interviews and observations of public meetings by the Grand Jury suggest the Measure A Oversight Committee performs its responsibilities in a conscientious and professional manner. However, public participation and attendance at Measure A Oversight Committee meetings are often limited, despite the significant amount of public money going towards Measure A priorities.

Maintaining separate oversight structures may create unneeded fragmentation or duplication. The County should evaluate whether Measure A oversight responsibilities should be integrated into a single oversight framework with more authority, and more comprehensive reviews of all Parks work.

Finally, while many Measure A spending items are clear and easily accessible to the public, not all are. Information regarding grants, conservation easement payments, and other Measure A-funded projects should be maintained in a clear and centralized format. For instance, while it's relatively simple to find who received FARE grants and how much, it's less clear who has received payment for agricultural easements.

Public scrutiny regarding governance and conflict-of-interest concerns related to agricultural conservation easements has previously been reported in the press and discussed in prior Grand Jury reporting.¹⁶ In response to some of these concerns, Marin Agricultural Land Trust adopted a

¹⁶ Marin County Grand Jury 2023-24, "Spending Public Money to Preserve Marin's Agricultural Heritage: Is Anyone Watching?" available at: <https://www.marincounty.gov/departments/grand-jury/civil-grand-jury-reports/2023-2024-civil-grand-jury-reports/spending-public-money-preserve-marins-agricultural-heritage-anyone-watching>.

revised conflict of interest policy in 2019.¹⁷ So long as Measure A funds continue to support agricultural easements, public trust could be enhanced by clear, easy-to-access reporting on easement payment amounts, recipients, and related payments.

Sustainable Agriculture Should Be Voted On Independently

Public Support For Sustainable Agriculture Is A Policy Judgment

Marin has a rich and long history of private agriculture businesses contributing to the food supply in the county. These businesses have shaped the landscape of West Marin over decades and therefore have become part of its identity. Advocates of government-supported agriculture programs argue that maintaining working agricultural landscapes preserves West Marin’s rural character, supports local food production, and discourages subdivision and low-density residential development on agricultural lands. These goals have informed Marin County land-use policy since at least the 1980s, and continue to receive support from many residents and public officials.

The Marin Agricultural Land Trust (“MALT”), founded in 1980 through cooperation between local agriculturalists and County leadership, was originally organized “to advance the express policies” of Marin County relating to preservation of “natural, scenic, agricultural and open-space land” and “educating the public as to land-use matters.”¹⁸

Measure A sustainable agriculture funding supports activities occurring on privately owned land through conservation easements and grants. This is a materially different type of public expenditure from funding publicly accessible parks, trails, or recreational facilities. While supporters argue these programs have environmental, scenic, and economic benefits, they also involve policy choices about how much public funds should support private agriculture. While there may be public benefits from agricultural subsidies, the underlying land and businesses are privately owned.

Reasonable disagreement exists regarding the scale of public support for ranching and grazing in Marin County. Environmental advocates point out that grazing can also lead to water pollution, habitat degradation, and conflicts with wildlife. Others question whether public spending on agricultural easements is the best use of funds compared to expanded public open space, habitat restoration, or recreational access.¹⁹

Supporters of agricultural programs dispute many of these criticisms and say working ranches help preserve open landscapes and reduce pressure for residential subdivision and development.

¹⁷ Marin Agricultural Land Trust, “Conflict of Interest Policy,” Adopted July 23, 2019, available at: <https://malt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2019-MALT-Conflict-of-Interest-Policy-.pdf>.

¹⁸ Articles of Incorporation of Marin Agricultural Land Trust, July 1, 1980, filed at the California Secretary of State’s Office.

¹⁹ Martin Griffin and Barry Spitz, “Marin Voice: Voters deserve transparency on Measure A renewal,” *Marin Independent Journal*, Sept. 20, 2021. Available at: <https://www.marinij.com/2021/09/20/marin-voice-malts-involvement-threatens-funding-renewal-for-measure-a/>.

The Grand Jury does not attempt to resolve these competing views, but finds that they represent legitimate disagreements. Voters should be able to evaluate these disagreements independently from decisions about parks and open space funding.

Agricultural Easement Programs Have Matured

Agricultural conservation easements have been a central component of Marin County’s land-use and conservation strategy for decades. According to the Marin Agricultural Land Trust, which manages conservation easements purchased with Measure A funds, conservation easements now protect nearly 59,000 acres, representing about half of all privately owned agricultural land in Marin County.²⁰

The evolving allocation of Measure A funds itself reflects recognition that agriculture priorities have changed over time. Under the original 2012 Measure A structure, approximately 90 percent of sustainable agriculture funding was directed toward conservation easements. After receiving public feedback in 2021, the share of funds allocated to easements in the 2022 version of Measure A was pared back to 50 percent, while additional funding was directed to stewardship programs run by the Marin Resource Conservation District and programs such as the FARE grants.

As the County is just a few years away from considering the composition of another Measure A renewal, this is an appropriate time to assess the value of additional easements versus other public priorities. The Grand Jury does not take a position on the proper level of easement funding, but finds that these are policy questions that voters should have the opportunity to evaluate separately from parks and open space funding.

Finally, West Marin agricultural land is already subject to restrictive agricultural zoning that sharply limits subdivision or residential development. In 1973, Marin adopted its Countywide Plan, which established A-60 zoning throughout West Marin, limiting residential development to one dwelling unit per 60 acres.²¹ The restrictions on development created by conservation easements exist *in addition to* Marin’s restrictive zoning in agricultural areas, which has withstood more than 50 years of political change and legal challenge.

Sustainable Agriculture Includes Multiple Program Types

The sustainable agriculture category within Measure A now includes a broad range of programs with differing goals, beneficiaries, and ways of delivering public benefit. While the first version of Measure A spent 95 percent of its agriculture funding on easements²², today’s Measure A

²⁰ Lily Verdone, MALT Executive Director, “How Public and Private Dollars Come Together to Protect Marin Farmland,” 5/20/2026, available at: <https://malt.org/land-protection/public-private-funding-marin-farmland/>.

²¹ Rob Rogers, “Original countywide plan of 1973 leaned heavily on limiting building,” *Marin Independent Journal*, Feb. 11, 2007. Available at: <https://www.marinij.com/2007/02/11/original-countywide-plan-of-1973-leaned-heavily-on-limiting-building/>.

²² The original Measure A put aside 90 percent of Farmland Preservation Program funds for easements that went to private landowners, 5 percent for matching grants to the Marin Resource Conservation District, and 5 percent for “matching grants to the entities holding easements,” i.e. MALT, for the purpose of enforcing the easement

spends just 50 percent of agriculture funds on easements. By 2024, Measure A had provided \$22.9M for farmland preservation, protecting 18 farms/ranches totaling 11,149 acres.²³

In the Fiscal year ending 2025, \$2.48 million, 14 percent of total Measure A revenues, went to farmland preservation. (This includes easements and MRCD funding).²⁴

FARE Grants

In addition to agricultural conservation easements, Measure A funds the Food, Agriculture and Resilient Ecosystems (FARE) grant program. The [FARE grants](#) are competitive grants supporting a broad range of projects related to sustainable agriculture, food systems, and environmental resilience.²⁵ Recent FARE grants have supported school and community gardens, fire resilience, food-security planning efforts, prescribed fire and grazing research, youth agricultural programs, and improvements on working farms and ranches.

The FARE program was created during the 2022 renewal of Measure A, which reduced the percentage of sustainable agriculture funding dedicated to conservation easements and redirected funding toward a wider range of environmental and community-oriented initiatives. This is a shift in how Marin defines sustainable agriculture and related public benefits. Instead of solely focusing on easements, Measure A now adds broader goals such as food systems education, community engagement, and increasing access to farmland for underserved communities.

For instance, 2026 grants included \$50,000 to “familiarize tribal citizens with restoration and management goals” at Dillon Beach Ranch, and gather feedback through field trips and workshops, and \$95,000 to the Canal Alliance to “develop detailed implementation plans and designs for a community market and commercial kitchen in the Canal neighborhood.”²⁶

The growing diversity reflects the complexity of Measure A’s current structure. Different programs serve different constituencies and have different theories of public benefit. The Grand Jury does not question the legitimacy or potential value of many FARE-supported initiatives. But fixed allocation structures could create long-term expectations that funding streams will continue indefinitely regardless of changing priorities or broader County needs.

The evolving priorities reinforce that voters should be able to evaluate sustainable agriculture funding independently from parks and open space funding. They also support giving greater

conditions. See, e.g., Grant Agreement for Disbursement of Tax Proceeds From The Measure A Farmland Preservation Program Between County of Marin and Marin Agricultural Land Trust,” August 4, 2015, viewable at: https://marin.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?clip_id=7691&meta_id=802920.

²³ Marin Agricultural Land Trust, “Measure A” blog post, accessed 5/25/26 at: <https://malt.org/active-issues/measure-a/>

²⁴ Independent Auditor’s Report on Measure A funds, Fiscal Year ending 2025, Published June 2026, available at: <https://parks.marincounty.gov/sites/parks/files/2026-02/Marin%20County%20Parks%20Measure%20A%202025%20Final.pdf>.

²⁵ <https://www.parks.marincounty.gov/projectsplans/fare-grants>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

flexibility to Marin County Parks in determining how funds within broad voter-approved categories are spent overtime.

Increased Funding for Marin Resource Conservation District

Measure A also now provides approximately \$640,000 per year to the Marin Resource Conservation District²⁷, which has expanded its staffing and stewardship work as a result. Marin RCD works with landowners on projects related to wildfire resilience, habitat restoration, water quality, carbon farming, and natural resource management. Unlike conservation easements, which involve paying money directly to landowners for permanent land-use restrictions, Marin RCD programs emphasize ongoing land stewardship and environmental management activities.

The growing role of Marin RCD further illustrates how the sustainable agriculture category has evolved into a broader environmental and land-management framework encompassing multiple approaches to conservation and public benefit.

Current Structure Limits Voter Choice

Measure A combines several distinct priorities into a single countywide sales tax measure:

- Maintenance and Growth of Public Land - Marin County Parks and Open Space
- Purchasing Conservation Easements on Private Land
- Sustainable Agriculture and Stewardship Projects on Private Land
- Community-Oriented Food and Environmental Grants to Non-Profits
- Local Parks and Recreation Grants to 19 Marin Cities and Special Districts

Marin County voters have repeatedly demonstrated strong support for parks and open space funding, approving both the original 2012 Measure A and the 2022 renewal measure by substantial margins. At the same time, public debate surrounding the 2022 renewal demonstrated that some residents and commentators supported continued parks funding while expressing differing views about the expenditures that go to private landowners.

The current structure of Measure A does not allow voters to separately evaluate these categories of spending.²⁸ Voters who strongly support parks and recreational investments may hold differing views regarding the appropriate level of public support for conservation easements, stewardship activities, and infrastructure projects occurring on privately owned lands. They also have not substantially weighed in on food systems initiatives and grants distributed mostly to smaller non-profits.

²⁷ “Marin County Measure A and Marin RCD,” Marin Resource Conservation District, 2022, available at: <https://www.marinrcd.org/marin-county-measure-a-and-marin-rcd>

²⁸ See., e.g., Richard Halstead, “Marin factions await fate of controversial parks tax measure,” *Marin Independent Journal*, May 7, 2022. Available at: <https://www.marinij.com/2022/05/07/marin-factions-await-fate-of-controversial-parks-tax-measure/>.

Likewise, voters who support sustainable agriculture programs may reasonably disagree about how funding should be distributed among easements, stewardship activities, educational programs, or community-based grants. Separating sustainable agriculture funding from parks and open space funding in future Measure A votes would provide more transparency and clearer democratic accountability.

If sustainable agriculture funding is to continue, whether as a standalone or as part of a future comprehensive Measure A renewal, Marin County should conduct a *separate* public input and planning process focused specifically on sustainable agriculture priorities and programs, similar to the process used to identify parks and open-space priorities.

CONCLUSION

Measure A is a critical source of funding for Marin County Parks and open space, and also benefits private agriculture. The Grand Jury found that Marin County Parks has administered Measure A funds effectively, and that the measure has enabled substantial and popular public investments.

At the same time, Measure A reflects priorities established more than a decade ago and has evolved into a complex funding structure supporting a range of programs.

The Grand Jury has two key conclusions regarding the future structure of Measure A.

First, we conclude that future renewals should provide all funds to Marin County Parks and allow Parks staff greater flexibility to address changing needs, rather than include fixed formulas for community grants, locality grants, and wildfire prevention.

Second, we conclude that voters should be allowed to vote on sustainable agriculture funding independently from parks and open space funding.

If Marin residents desire to spend public money on conservation and stewardship programs on private agricultural land, that is a legitimate policy choice. But this choice can and should face the same test of voter approval that our schools, transportation systems, and other public services are routinely subject to. It should not be embedded within a popular parks measure without separate consideration.

FINDINGS

- F1.** Marin County Parks has successfully administered Measure A funding and has evolved its focus from land acquisition toward stewardship, maintenance, wildfire resilience, and long-term sustainability.
- F2.** Fixed allocation formulas within Measure A limit Marin County Parks' ability to adjust to changing priorities and long-term planning.
- F3.** The fixed allocation of Measure A funds to cities, towns, and special districts limits Marin County Parks' ability to direct funding toward larger regional projects and countywide priorities.
- F4.** The Measure A Oversight Committee provides meaningful oversight of Measure A expenditures, but other bodies, including the Parks and Open Space Commission, provide similar oversight and opportunities for public participation.
- F5.** Information regarding conservation easement payments and recipients is not easily accessible to the public, in contrast to information regarding other Measure A-funded programs.
- F6.** Measure A combines parks and open space funding with sustainable agriculture funding in a way that is unusual among California county funding measures.
- F7.** Agricultural conservation easements now protect more than half of West Marin County's agricultural land, and provide an additional layer of protection beyond A-60 zoning restrictions.
- F8.** Marin County voters have repeatedly demonstrated strong support for parks and open space funding, but have not had an opportunity to separately evaluate sustainable agriculture funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1.** Prior to placing a Measure A renewal proposal before voters, expected to occur before the current measure expires in 2031, the Marin County Board of Supervisors should consider developing separate ballot measures for (a) parks and open space funding and (b) sustainable agriculture funding, to allow voters to separately evaluate each measure.
- R2.** Prior to any vote on renewing sustainable agriculture funding, the Marin County Board of Supervisors should direct Marin County Parks to conduct a public outreach process focused on sustainable agriculture priorities, similar to the public engagement process used to identify parks and open space priorities.
- R3.** In future Measure A renewals, the Marin County Board of Supervisors should consider reducing or eliminating fixed allocation formulas, and provide Marin County Parks with greater discretion over spending.
- R4.** In future Measure A renewals, the Marin County Board of Supervisors should consider eliminating the fixed allocation of Measure A funds to cities, towns, and special districts and instead allow Marin County Parks to direct funds based on regional priorities and public benefit.
- R5.** By July 1, 2027, Marin County Parks should maintain a centralized and publicly accessible reporting system identifying Measure A grant recipients, conservation easement recipients, and payment amounts.
- R6.** In future Measure A renewals, the Marin County Board of Supervisors should consolidate existing Marin County Parks oversight structures, including the Measure A Community Oversight Committee and the Parks and Open Space Commission.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses from the following governing bodies:

From the following governing bodies within 90 days:

- Marin County Board of Supervisors (F1-8, R1–4, R6)

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted in accordance with Penal Code section 933, subdivision (c) and subject to the notice, agenda and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

INVITED RESPONSES

- Marin County Parks (F2-4, R2, R5)
- Marin Resource Conservation District (R1)
- Marin County Measure A Community Oversight Committee (F4, R6)
- Parks and Open Space Oversight Commission (F4, R6)

Note: At the time this report was prepared (May 2026) information was available at the websites cited.
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Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury <u>not</u> contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury. The California State Legislature has stated that it intends Penal Code Section 929 to encourage full candor in testimony in Grand Jury investigations by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of those who participate in any Civil Grand Jury investigation.
