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Dairy farm owners paid as part of Fort Drum land buffer program

By GORDON BLOCK
TIMES STAFF WRITER
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2012

FORT DRUM — The owners of a dairy farm near post will be paid to limit development as a part of a military program to protect training areas.

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Hampson D. and Betty Platt will receive \$187,000 as a part of the Army Compatible Use Buffer program, which in the past few years has doled out more than \$3 million. The Platt's 567-acre plot is in the towns of Antwerp and Rossie.

The farm will be the 11th project to be included in the program, which covers about 2,430 acres around the post area.

The program pairs property owners with the post, the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust and Ducks Unlimited to create an individual conservation plan for the property and set up an appraisal of the property's non-farm development rights. The program ensures that lands near the post will be limited in use to agricultural and forestry purposes.

The properties remain in private ownership and on the tax rolls, and property owners are allowed full control of how they manage their land within those purposes.

Linda M. Garrett, executive director of the trust, said the program allows the post to ensure its training spaces, the commission to protect farmland and habitat areas and farmers to receive money to keep doing what they had already been doing with their farms.

"We kind of call it a win-win-win," she said.

Mrs. Garrett noted that other military installations that had found problems with development near their borders had faced the threat of reduced soldier placements.

"We don't want that to happen here at Fort Drum," she said.

Mr. Platt, reached by phone Tuesday afternoon, said the funds would help him and his wife build up a retirement fund. He said he agreed to the deal when he realized the program would not affect any portion of his operation.

He said at 72 years old, he was looking at retirement and the future of his farm. Mr. Platt said his son had expressed interest in continuing the farm's operations as is.

The purchase of the easement comes as the program shifts its focus to a new primary conservation area toward the southern border of the post. Mrs. Garrett said the post had relayed some concerns to her about the possibility of large wind turbines near the post creating issues for radar sensors and low-flying aircraft.

A pair of information sessions about the program for residents near the post area will be held at 11:30 a.m. and 7 p.m. Nov. 8 at Grace Episcopal Church, 2939 Cataract Str., Copenhagen.

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