



Stan, left, and Russ Denner fear they will be pressured to sell their 100-year-old family farm so the land can revert to 'a big duck pond'

MARY CARROLL

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Laguna farmers endangered?

Ranchers unhappy with Bosco's plan

Cattle ranchers Russ and Stan Denner take a dim view of Rep. Doug Bosco's plan to create a 9,000-acre wildlife reserve along the Laguna de Santa Rosa, the waterway that has ebbed and flowed along with five generations of the Denner family.

Life on the Denner ranch is closely linked to the lazy laguna, which snakes along the property's western edge bringing winter flood waters and rich silt industriously used by the Denners to create some 200 acres of farm land on their 500-acre spread.

This is Denner country, they say, and they don't want bird watchers and wildflower fanciers tramping over their cow pastures and corn fields. Mostly they fear Bosco's ambitious

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plan to preserve the laguna will eventually banish them from the land their family has been farming for 100 years.

The Denners, who've lost little of their grandfather's pioneer spirit, say there's no way they'll leave their land — no matter how much money the government waves in front of them.

"No amount of money would make a difference because this ranch is not for sale. We've worked too hard and too long to give it up," said Stan, 68, whose grandfather settled the ranch in 1890.

For his part, Bosco said the \$14 million in government funds he is seeking to buy land along the laguna will only be used to purchase property from owners who want to sell.

He reiterated that stance last week. He said there will not be a massive laguna land grab by the federal government and ranchers have nothing to worry about.

"No one is going to have to sell their land unless they want to. I recognize that agriculture is one of the most important ways of protecting open space and the rural environment," said Bosco. "Most ranchers will find it very easy to co-habitat with the laguna."

But Bosco's remarks don't comfort the Denners, who have been on their ranch since back when everyone in Sonoma County was a farmer — now something the family can only wish were so.

Over the years there have agricultural booms and busts on the Denner ranch but the cherished land, nurtured by the laguna, has always provided food for the table.

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Tim Tesconi's agriculture column appears Mondays in The Press Democrat.