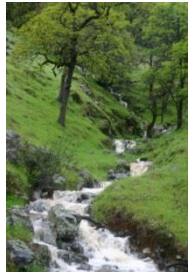


# Williamson Act & Rangeland Production



**Ken Tate and Leslie Roche**  
*UC Davis and UC Cooperative Extension*

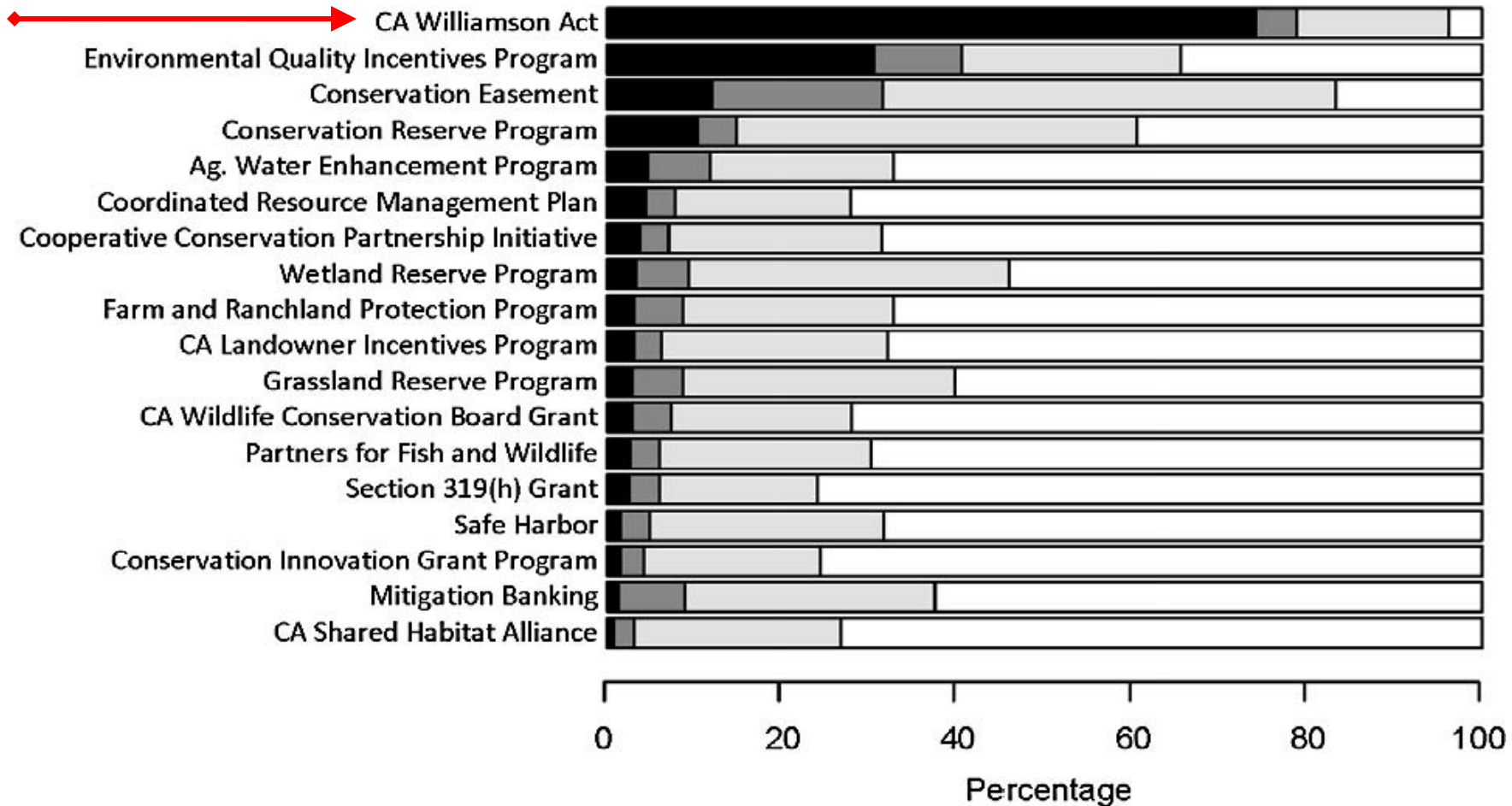


**Grazing Workshop • Mariposa County UCCE • March 2014**

# Williamson Act

- **California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act).**
- **One of the nation's oldest agricultural conservation incentive programs.**
- **To preserve agricultural and open space lands by encouraging landowners to stay in agricultural production through reduced property tax rates.**
- **Landowners voluntarily commit to maintaining their land in agricultural production under a local county contract for a minimum of 10 years.**
- **The economic success of agriculture in California is intertwined with the Williamson Act.**

# 507 CA Ranchers Conservation Program Participation



- I am aware of this initiative and currently participate in it
- I am aware of this initiative and have plans to participate in it in the future
- I am aware of this initiative and have no plans to participate in it
- I am not aware of this initiative and have not used it

# Williamson Act

- **Via the Open Space Subvention Act of 1971, the State of California provided local governments with annual subvention funds to cover forgone property tax revenues.**
- **Contract-holding counties received annual subvention payments from the state in proportion to their enrollment and to the productivity of the enrolled lands.**
- **These payments have been suspended in recent years due to revenue shortfalls.**
- **Contract-holding counties are wrestling with if and how to continue these contracts.**

# CA Ranchers and Williamson Act

**We asked 507 CA Ranchers**

*“What is your biggest concern  
for the future of your  
operation?”*



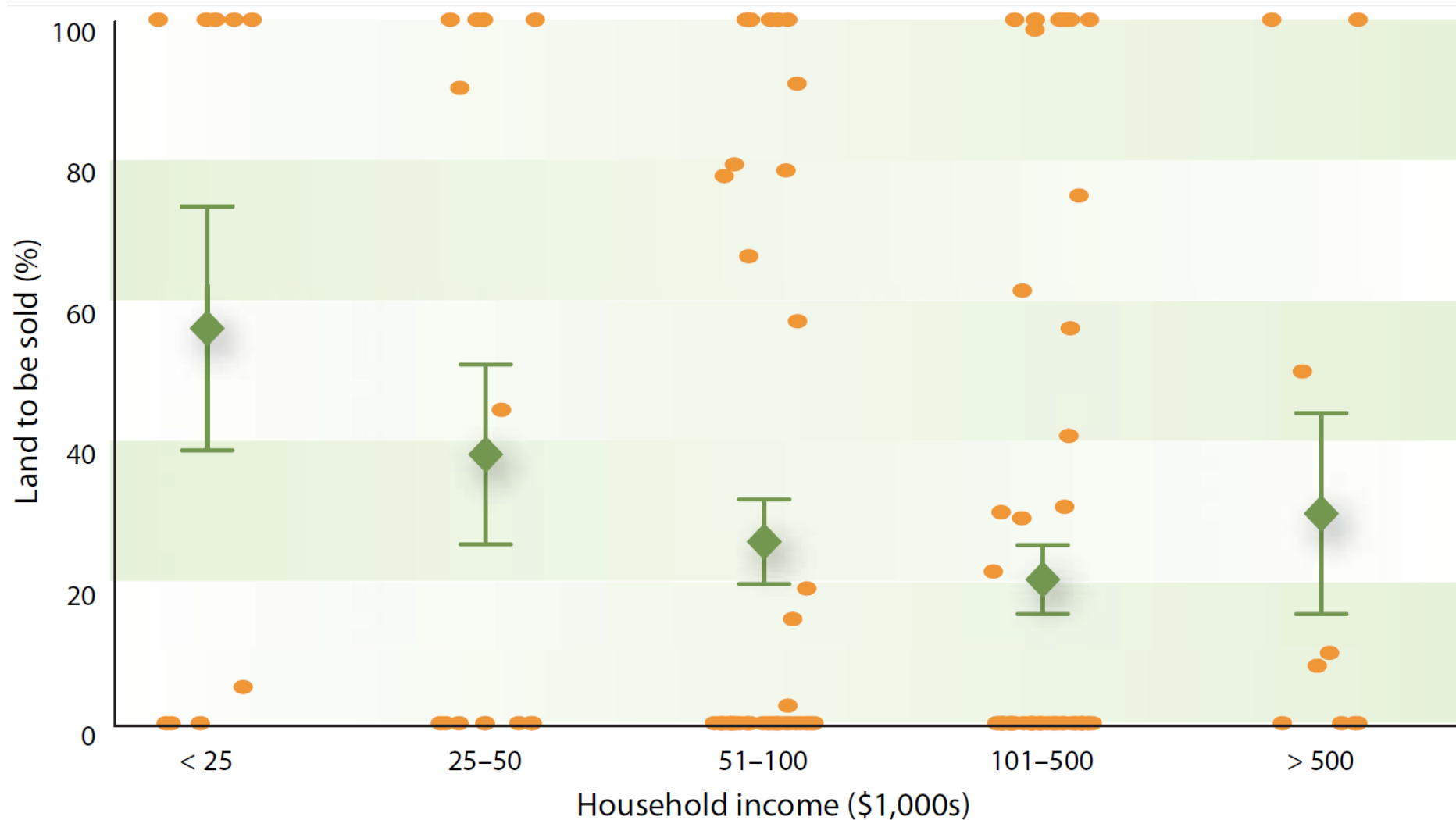
**■ 43% Reported Economic Viability**

**■ 25% Specific Reported Loss of Williamson Act**

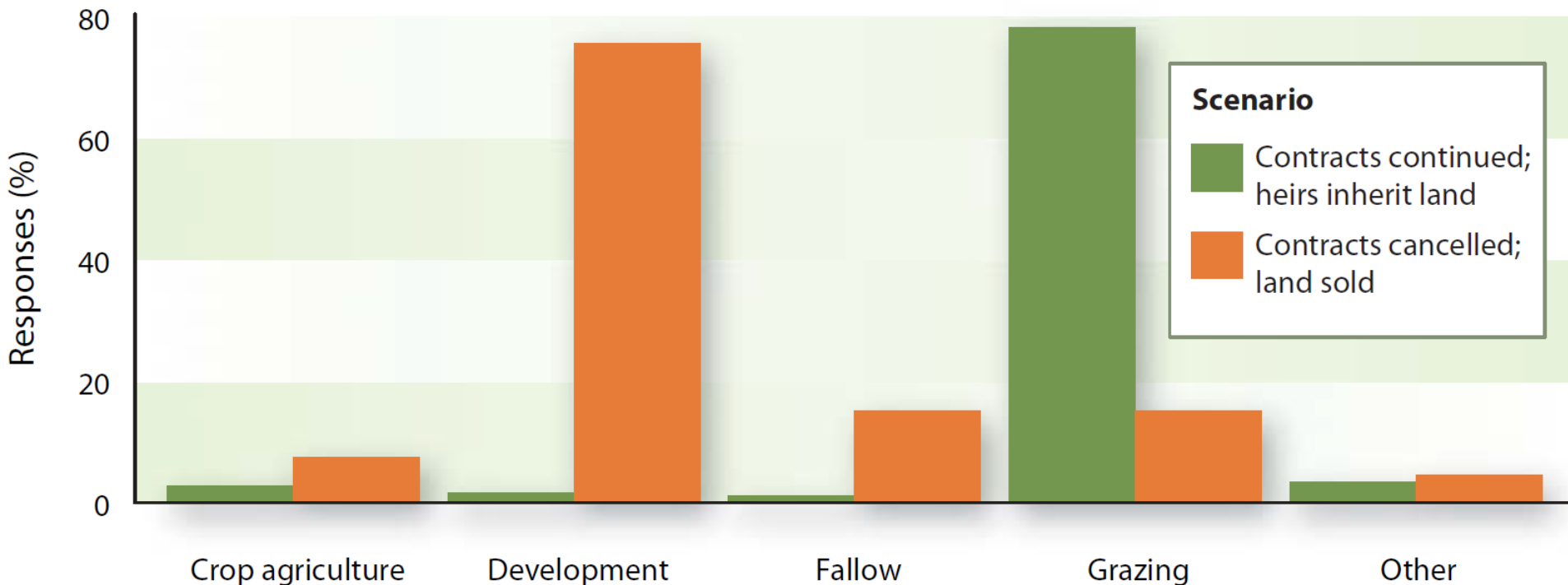
# **Analysis reveals potential rangeland impacts if Williamson Act eliminated**

- **Wetzel et al. explored the economic and ecological impacts if counties eliminate Williamson Act contracts.**
  - **With CA Cattlemen's Association sent a mail survey to 702 CCA members in 33 counties.**
  - **52% Response rate.**
  - **67% of respondents held rangeland contracts in Williamson Act.**
- 
- **91% reported Williamson Act was “very” to “extremely” important for the long-term viability of their ranching operation.**

# Rancher estimates of percentage of rangeland they would sell grouped by household income.



# Rancher predictions for future use of land by heirs if 1) Williamson Act contracts continued, or 2) if eliminated and land was sold.





# Summary

- Williamson Act funding is the most widely used conservation incentive program by CA ranchers – there is not a close second.
- Williamson Act savings may make a critical difference in turning a profit versus taking a loss for the majority of California ranchers.
- Profitability is required for rangeland production and conservation win-wins to occur.
- Funding Williamson Act is a difficult issue, but its conservation value on rangelands is real.