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Educational farm seeks money to close escrow

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By Elizabeth Fitzsimons

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

January 23, 2004

PAUMA VALLEY – An organic educational farm that received government help to buy and conserve 85 acres is looking for help in raising money needed to close escrow.

Tierra Miguel Farm had been feverishly trying to come up with \$566,000 by Jan. 31, but last week was given an extension to April 30.

"It doesn't mean the pressure is off," said Charlene Orszag, president of the Tierra Miguel Foundation. "But at least it is more realistic."

The money raised would cover the trucks, large coolers and other equipment on the farm that was not included in the original appraisal.

In September, the nonprofit farm was awarded \$1.9 million in federal and state grants and a loan to not only buy the land on Pauma Valley Drive, but also to protect it from future development.

A state and federal grant of \$475,000 allowed Tierra Miguel to buy an easement giving it development rights to the land, which is off Cole Grade Road, west of state Route 76.

"That is the first agricultural conservation easement in Southern California," Orszag said. "It's a powerful way to hold farmers in farming."

The farm must repay the state the \$1.43 million used to buy the land. For the equipment, the farm would need to raise about \$600,000.

Tierra Miguel is looking to corporations and individuals – anyone who can help. The farm has begun a pledge drive, with people signing a commitment of three years.

A Community Supported Agriculture program helps support the farm, which is run by a foundation. Members pay a monthly fee for weekly



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boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables grown by Tierra Miguel. Small boxes cost \$119 a month; large boxes are \$144.

The farm has more than 300 members and delivers to pickup sites in Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange and San Diego counties.

"It's a new way for people to participate," Orszag said. "We're excited about the idea of having more people connected to us. The whole idea is to encourage community education."

The farm hosts school groups from throughout Southern California and invites interns from other countries to work on the farm and learn about sustainable agriculture.

To learn about the farm, visit its Web site, <http://www.tierramiguel.org>, or call (760) 742-1199.

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