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Last modified Tuesday, August 21, 2007 8:07 PM PDT

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Pauma band buys 85-acre organic farm

By: QUINN EASTMAN - Staff Writer

PAUMA VALLEY -- A nonprofit foundation that sells fruits and vegetables to local schools has found a buyer for the 85-acre organic farm that it has run since 2000: the Pauma band of Mission Indians.



Tierra Miguel organic farm in Pauma Valley.

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The sale ends a yearlong period of uncertainty for the Tierra Miguel Foundation, when foundation President Beth Ann Levendoski thought the farm might have to move elsewhere, she said Tuesday.

The Pauma band has agreed to lease the land back to Tierra Miguel and to support the farm financially for the next 10 years.

The tribe bought the property for \$1.4 million, donated \$350,000 to the farm and also pledged a \$300,000 grant over 10 years to provide educational programs.



Gloria Hewitt the store manager for Tierra Miguel organic farm in Pauma Valley.

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In addition to working with schools, the foundation also delivers produce-filled boxes to paying members in the Los Angeles and San Diego areas. Its Pauma Valley neighbors drop by the farm, just off Cole Grade Road, to pick up fresh fruits and vegetables.

The delivery service is now sold out, but Pauma's financial support could allow Tierra Miguel to expand for the season starting in September, Levendoski said. A year of weekly deliveries is expected to cost \$1,900.

Other "community-supported agriculture" organizations in San Diego County include Be Wise Ranch and Seabreeze Organic Farm.

An unusual part of the sale, announced last week by tribal officials, is the agreement by the Pauma band that it can be sued if the tribe violates the terms of a "conservation



Jilberto Carrasco works for Tierra Miguel organic farm in Pauma Valley.

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easement" placed on the property in 2004.

The easement says that the property can't be developed and must continue to be used for agriculture, even though the Pauma band is planning to build a \$300 million casino resort about 1.5 miles to the north of the farm.

"It sets a good precedent," said Wallace Tucker, chairman of the Fallbrook Land Conservancy, which holds the easement and monitors the land once a year.

American Indian tribes, as sovereign nations, can't be sued unless they agree to allow it.

With its purchase of an organic farm, Pauma joins the neighboring Pala tribe, which recently bought a 200-acre organic citrus orchard near the Pauma reservation.

Pauma has a history of supporting reforestation projects on its reservation and also grows avocados, oranges and lemons.

"The tribal government and membership support the preservation of organic farming practices and believe that agricultural education will empower future generations," Pauma Chairman Chris Devers said last week.

The sale of the farm property completes a chain of events that began in 2004 when the Tierra Miguel Foundation bought the land from strawberry farmer Bill Potter, who had wanted to build homes close to the neighboring Pauma Valley Country Club.

The foundation received \$1.9 million in state grants in order to buy the land as well as the development rights from Potter, but the grants required the foundation to offer the land for sale to a permanent buyer within two years.

Levendoski said the foundation was formed in 1999 when its founders took over a produce-distribution network in the Los Angeles area.

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They're back! Who cares?

Seems that while hubby Becks has been warming the bench for the LA Galaxy, Posh and the rest of the Spice Girls are gearing up for a reunion. And in the category of "When did they break up?" is the recently announced reunion tour of Van Halen, Diamond Dave and all. So does anyone really give a hoot? OK, maybe the pending train wreck of Mr. Roth could be tempting. But the Spice Ladies (c'mon, they're no longer girls) haven't been off the charts long enough to garner any nostalgia. Heck, most people who listened to them the first time go 'round aren't even due for their 10-year high school reunion yet. [Post your Comments](#)

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