



New Life for the Octopus: How Voting Rules Sustain the Power of California's Big Landowners

By Dr. Mason Gaffney and Merrill Goodall

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Abstract supplied by Wiley Publishing: The concentrated ownership of farmland has influenced rural life in the state of California for more than a century. Reformers have introduced measures to counteract that concentration, such as acreage limits on farms receiving water from federally funded projects. Large landowners have fought back with policies that have protected their ability to amass and maintain their empires. In the first part of this article, Mason Gaffney presents this historical background in broad outlines. In the second part, Merrill Goodall explains an important policy that preserves the power of entrenched interests: water districts that are governed by a board elected by a voting system that allots one vote to each dollar of land value. In these districts, a tiny handful of landowners is able to control a public agency without opposition and without the need to persuade other voters.

Author of *After the Crash: Designing a Depression-Free Economy* (2009) and *The Corruption of Economics* (1999). Goodall: Deceased 2002. Goodall taught political science at Claremont Graduate University. Two of his areas of research interest were water policy in California and public administration in Nepal.