



SECTION 8 AGRICULTURAL LANDS

8.0 INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the most extensive land use in Yuba county and the most significant component of the county's economy. Approximately 278,943 acres, or 68 percent of the total county area, are comprised of agricultural croplands and pasture. The value of agricultural land, however, is not limited to the provision of food, fiber and jobs. Agricultural land also provides open space which has both psychological and aesthetic benefits, and provides important wildlife habitat. The importance of agricultural land preservation can, therefore, be viewed from both an economic and environmental perspective.

Yuba County recognizes the importance of agricultural land and the need to place an emphasis on its preservation. The County's desire to preserve its most valuable farmland and to support the economic viability of the agricultural economy is reflected in goals, objectives, policies and implementation strategies set forth in this *General Plan*. These goals, objectives, policies and implementation strategies are compiled and presented in this section in order to allow the reader to quickly become familiar with the County's commitment to agricultural land preservation. At the end of each statement, a reference is made to the category and number where the goal, policy, etc. can be found. For example, 6-OSCG refers to the sixth goal contained in the *Open Space and Conservation Elements*, 25-LUP refers to policy 25 of the *Land Use Element*.

This *General Plan* is not intended to restrict existing, new, and expanding agricultural operations. Agricultural operations including, but not limited to the raising of livestock; all soil cultivation and related activities to crop production, harvesting, and processing; and timber management and harvesting are considered uses by right in all *General Plan* designations and zoning districts that permit agriculture.



8.1 GOALS, OBJECTIVES, POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Goals:

- Retain the most productive agricultural lands in agricultural use, and clearly define areas suitable for urbanization and other forms of non-agricultural development. (2-LUG)
- Protect productive agricultural land. (6-OSCG)

Objectives:

- Establishment of Community Boundaries for all community and specific plan areas with average densities of one unit per five acres or greater. (8-LUO)
- Avoidance of Resource Conservation Service Capability Class I and II soils when establishing Community Boundaries or otherwise reviewing proposals for non-agricultural development. (9-LUO)
- Application and maintenance of agricultural zoning with a minimum parcel size of 40 acres on all Class I and II soils. (10-LUO)
- Within three years, establishment of specific mechanisms in County land use regulations for acquisition and/or transfer of development rights and purchase of conservation easements in areas containing Class I and II soils, and other areas identified as having special agricultural value. (11-LUO)
- Retention of at least 50 percent of the non-prime field crop land now in agricultural production for agricultural use during the term of the Plan. (12-LUO)
- Retention of all land used for intensive agriculture located north of the City of Marysville for agricultural use during the term of the Plan. (13-LUO)
- Retention of at least 70 percent of grazing lands and timberlands situated outside Community Boundaries for agricultural purposes. (14-LUO)
- Within three years, establishment of specific mechanisms in County land use regulations for acquisition and/or transfer of development rights and purchase of conservation



easements in areas containing grazing and timberlands located outside Community Boundaries. (15-LUO)

- Recognition of a farmer's right to continue to farm. (16-LUO)
- Utilization of soil conservation practices as recommended by the Natural Resource Conservation Service. (25-OSCO)
- Creation of a task force composed of county water interests to draft a water utilization and distribution plan which will address the county's water needs during the term of this *General Plan*, including water for agriculture, growth, wildlife and recreation. (30-OSCO)
- Expansion of surface water use for land designated Valley Agriculture, Agriculture/Rural Residential and Foothill Agriculture in lieu of continued reliance on groundwater. (31-OSCO)

Policies:

- Community Boundaries shall be utilized as a method to preserve agricultural land and promote orderly growth in the county. (28-LUP)
- Urban-agricultural interface areas shall be recognized in proximity to Community Boundaries, within which all new development projects shall incorporate a buffer zone at least 300 feet in depth to separate the development project from surrounding agricultural land. This requirement may be eliminated or modified if there are significant topographical differences, substantial vegetation, or existing physical barriers between urban and agricultural areas. (29-LUP)
- Permanent physical features or barriers shall be used to separate agricultural from rural residential or urban uses wherever possible. Such features include rivers, streams, canals, roads, railroads, levees and topographical features. (30-LUP)
- The conversion of agricultural or open land to urban development within Community Boundaries shall be permitted to occur only as an extension of the urbanized area of the community. Community Boundaries shall not be used as justification for leapfrog development. (31-LUP)



- Agricultural land capability shall be a primary determinant when establishing or modifying Community Boundaries. (32-LUP)
- Non-agricultural development projects shall be directed to marginal agricultural lands. (33-LUP)
- Areas in which agricultural zoning is to be applied shall be identified on the *Land Use Diagram*. (34-LUP)
- Zoning with minimum parcel size designations large enough to maintain present agricultural uses shall be applied to all areas designated for Valley Agriculture on the *Land Use Diagram* unless the area is already committed to rural residential or other non-agricultural use. (35-LUP)
- The subdivision of lands shown on the *Land Use Diagram* for Valley Agriculture into parcels less than 40 acres in size shall be prohibited unless such development project meets the following conditions:
 - The subdivision is part of a farm employee housing project that embodies a cluster development concept, and such a project is permitted by the applicable zoning; the division of land is necessary to permit creation of a parcel no greater than 5 acres in size when a farmer wishes to retire while retaining a residence, or the proposed lot lines correspond to natural or human created features.
 - The project will not conflict with adjacent agricultural operations; and
 - The project will not hamper or discourage long-term agricultural operations either on-site or on adjacent agricultural lands. (36-LUP)
 - The County shall commit sufficient staff and budgetary resources to establish a program for protection of agricultural lands utilizing non-zoning techniques. (37-LUP)
 - The voluntary donation of conservation easements or other development restrictions to the County or a qualified private nonprofit corporation to preserve the agricultural use of land in areas designated for agricultural use shall be solicited and encouraged, where development of land would promote incompatible use. (38-LUP)



- Land designated as Important Farmland on the Important Farmlands Map that is not in a designated Community Boundary or a Planning Reserve or Specific Plan area shall be protected from non-agricultural encroachment by designating the land Valley Agriculture, with a minimum parcel size that maintains present agricultural uses. (39-LUP)
- Expansion of Community Boundaries on the valley floor shall be minimized while infill and intensification of use are encouraged. (40-LUP)
- All lands located outside Community Boundaries and located north of State Highway 20 on the valley floor shall be designated Valley Agriculture on the *Land Use Diagram* and zoned for agriculture, unless the site is already committed to rural residential or other non-agricultural use. (41-LUP)
- All foothill and mountain areas outside Community Boundaries shall be designated for Foothill Agriculture or other similar category on the *Land Use Diagram* and zoned in a manner which permits continuation of grazing and timber harvest activities. (42-LUP)
- The County shall commit sufficient staff and budgetary resources to establish a program for protection of grazing and timberlands utilizing non-zoning techniques. (43-LUP)
- The voluntary donation of conservation easements or other development restrictions to the County or a qualified nonprofit corporation to preserve the use of land for grazing or timber production in areas designated for agricultural or timber use shall be solicited and encouraged, when proposed development would conflict with timber and grazing operations. (44-LUP)
- The County shall continue to maintain and support right to farm statutes and policies. (45-LUP)
- The County shall provide for the orderly transition of lands within Community Boundaries from agricultural to urban use, and agricultural uses shall be encouraged and allowed to continue until such time as urban development occurs. (46-LUP)



- Community Boundaries shall be used as an official definition of the interface between future urban and agricultural uses, and to identify the areas set aside for those types of uses which benefit from community services. (78-LUP)
- Clustering of residential development projects when parcels are adjacent to commercial agricultural lands shall be encouraged to place dwellings as far as possible from the agricultural land. (113-LUP)
- New non-agricultural development projects immediately adjacent to lands designated for agriculture shall be designed to provide buffers at least 300 feet in width such as setbacks, berms, greenbelts, and open space areas to separate farmland from new urban uses. (114-LUP)
- Development projects within or adjacent to designated agricultural areas shall incorporate design, construction, and maintenance techniques that protect agriculture and minimize conflicts with adjacent agricultural uses. (115-LUP)
- Greenspace proposed in conjunction with new development projects shall be used when feasible to buffer development from agricultural lands. (117-LUP)
- The natural resources upon which the county's basic economy depends (recreation, agriculture, mining and tourism) shall be protected. (140-LUP)



- Natural resource areas, open space lands and scenic resource areas, as identified by Volume I of this *General Plan*, shall be maintained in a manner that does not compromise their resource, open space and scenic values unless no other reasonable alternatives exist. Where impacts may occur, mitigation shall be provided which fully compensates for the identified impacts. (27-OSCP)
- The County shall zone ricelands located north of the City of Marysville for agricultural use in order to promote their retention for agriculture, waterfowl habitat and waterfowl hunting clubs. (79-OSCP)
- The County shall support the continuation of an adequate supply of water to District 10 for agriculture and waterfowl habitat purposes. (83-OSCP)
- The County shall encourage close cooperation between agriculture and the local Resource Conservation District in order to assure that all appropriate steps are taken to preserve the county's agricultural soils. (108-OSCP)
- The retention of agriculture as a primary extensive land use shall be encouraged by the County in order to maintain agriculture's economic viability, but also its contribution to the preservation of open space and wildlife habitat. (110-OSCP)
- The County shall encourage compatible multiple use of agricultural lands to enhance their viability, including hunting clubs and preserves, and other recreational development. (112-OSCP)
- The County shall support efforts by private farmland conservation groups such as the American Farmland Trust to utilize conservation easements to preserve agricultural land. (113-OSCP)
- The County shall support efforts to merge or revert to acreage lots in "paper" subdivisions where lots are substandard in size for agricultural purposes. (114-OSCP)
- The County shall ensure that zoning and other land use regulations do not unnecessarily restrict agriculturally related enterprise which provides supplemental income and enhances agricultural viability, such as on-farm packing and sales, including sales from roadside stands. (115-OSCP)



- Water utilization and distribution planning shall include strategies for bringing surface water supplies to all areas designated on the *Land Use Diagram* as Valley Agriculture, Agriculture/Rural Residential and Foothill Agriculture. (130-OSCP)

Implementation Strategies:

- Quantify and report on an annual basis the amount of agricultural land lost to development and maintain cumulative totals since adoption of the *General Plan*. (6-LUI)

Lead Agency:Planning Department

Priority:Ongoing

- Review and amend the *County Zoning Ordinance* text and map, and *County Subdivision Ordinance* to assure consistency with *General Plan* objectives and policies for agricultural lands preservation. (7-LUI)

Lead Agencies:Planning Department, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors

Priority:1

- Maintain a development project review process which documents compliance with the adopted objectives and policies for agricultural lands preservation for each development project considered by the County. (8-LUI)

Lead Agency:Planning Department

Priority:Ongoing

- Establish specific criteria and standards for use of agricultural buffer zones. (9-LUI)

Lead Agency:Planning Department, Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors

Priority:1



- Create a committee of citizens and staff interested in the subject of agricultural lands preservation techniques to work with the County in the creation of non-zoning techniques for the preservation of agricultural lands. (10-LUI)

Lead Agency:Board of Supervisors

Priority1