

4.2 Agriculture Resources

4.2.1 Abstract

Monterey County contains some of the most productive farmland in the United States. The county's agricultural economy (\$3.49 billion in 2006) is the third largest in California. As of 2006, there were more than 1.3 million acres of agricultural lands in the county, representing more than 60% of the total land area: 236,142 acres are identified as Important Farmland (See Exhibit 4.2.1) and 1,065,577 acres are identified as grazing land by the California Department of Conservation (Department of Conservation 2006). As of 2007, approximately 763,396 acres of Monterey County farmlands are protected under Williamson Act, Farmland Security Zone, or other enforceable restrictions. During the past two decades, the total acreage of land in agricultural use in Monterey County has remained relatively constant with only nominal change.

Development and land use activities contemplated by the 2007 General Plan would result in the following significant impacts on agriculture resources:

- **Loss of Important Farmland**—Implementation of the 2007 General Plan would result in the conversion of approximately 2,571 acres of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use. No mitigation is available to reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level. It should be noted that from 1984 to 2006, while there was conversion of important farmland to urban use, there was a net increase in important farmland due to the conversion of grazing land or natural land to important farmland; a similar phenomena is expected to occur in the future.
- **Conversion of Agricultural Land to Non-Agricultural Uses**—Because it provides for additional residential development as required under State Planning Law, implementation of the 2007 General Plan would create development pressures that would result in the conversion of agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses. Such pressures also primarily stem from future growth within the Salinas Valley's incorporated cities. No mitigation is available to reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level. As noted above, it is expected that new farmland will be created over the lifetime of the General Plan similar to past trends.

4.2.2 Introduction

This section identifies and evaluates issues related to agricultural resources in the General Plan action area.

The "Environmental Setting" discussion below describes the current setting of the action area. The purpose of this information is to establish the existing

environmental context against which the reader can then understand the environmental changes caused by the action. The environmental setting information is intended to be directly or indirectly relevant to the subsequent discussion of impacts.

The environmental changes associated with the action are discussed under “Impact Analysis.” This section identifies impacts, describes how they would occur, and prescribes mitigation measures to reduce significant impacts, if necessary.

4.2.3 Environmental Setting

4.2.3.1 Overview and History

Monterey County contains some of the most productive farmland in the United States. The Salinas Valley accounts for nearly all of the agricultural production in Monterey County and is known as the “Salad Bowl of the World” because of its voluminous production of vegetable crops.

The Salinas Valley is 10 to 20 miles wide by (150 miles long). The Salinas River, the third longest in the state, winds through the valley, and its aquifer is the main source of water for agriculture. The Salinas Valley is framed by mountain ranges on the east and west and runs the length of the county. Salinas, the largest city in the County, is located in the Salinas Valley, as are the smaller cities of Gonzales, Greenfield, King City, and Soledad. The north end of the Salinas Valley opens to the Pacific Ocean, which is the source of the marine influence that cools the valley, creating ideal conditions for a wide range of crops. The unique geography of the Salinas Valley allows for the production of cool-season vegetable crops due to the marine influence that produces abundant summer fog. The marine influence diminishes with distance from the ocean, producing a gradient of climate that allows the production of a wide range of crops.

Monterey County agriculture is notable for its diversity of crops, many of which are grown year-round. Approximately 45 commodities in the county have a gross value of more than \$1 million each. The highest percentage of farmland acreage is devoted to cool-season vegetables, including lettuce, broccoli, spinach, cauliflower, artichokes, and celery. In the southern half of the county, farmers grow warm-season vegetables, including carrots, peppers, potatoes, and tomatoes. The cool-season crops listed above are also grown at certain times in the south part of the county. Monterey County is also home to a sizable wine grape industry and produces more than a quarter of the state’s annual strawberry yield.

4.2.3.2 Agricultural Economy

The *California Agricultural Resource Directory 2007* indicates that Monterey County’s agricultural economy of \$3.49 billion is the third largest in the state (California Department of Food and Agriculture 2007). Agriculture accounts for more than 25% of countywide employment during peak seasons. The agriculture sector and related food processing activities together constitute important export activities that bring money into Monterey County. Table 4.2-1 summarizes the overall contribution of the Monterey County agricultural economy between 1994 and 2007.

Table 4.2-1. Monterey County Agricultural Economy (1994–2007)

Year	Agricultural Economy (billions of dollars)	Rank in State
2006	\$3.49	3
2004	\$3.39	3
2003	\$3.29	3
2002	\$2.83	3
2001	\$2.75	3
2000	\$2.92	3
1999	\$2.37	3
1998	\$2.30	3
1997	\$2.27	3
1996	\$1.93	4
1995	\$2.01	3
1994	\$1.93	4

Sources: United States Department of Agriculture. *Summary of County Agricultural Commissioner’s Reports 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004.*

California Department of Food and Agriculture. *California Agricultural Resource Directory 2007.* Sacramento, CA. 2007.

Table 4.2-2 summarizes the top 10 agricultural commodities produced in Monterey County by dollar value in 2006. As the table illustrates, the growth of diversity in crops in Monterey County over the years has ensured that agriculture remains the leading economic activity for the region.

In terms of dollar value, Monterey County is the state’s leading producer of lettuce, broccoli, miscellaneous salad greens, spinach, cauliflower, mushrooms, cabbage, and artichokes. Table 4.2-3 summarizes Monterey County’s statewide ranking for the production of top agricultural commodities in 2006. In addition, Table 4.2-3 illustrates the importance of Monterey County’s agri-business to California, with 15 of its crops in the state’s top three in terms of production.

Table 4.2-2. Leading Monterey County Agricultural Commodities (2006)

Rank	Commodity	Dollar Value (millions of dollars)
1	Lettuce, leaf	\$630
2	Lettuce, head	\$444
3	Strawberries	\$440
4	Nursery	\$339
5	Broccoli	\$234
6	Grapes	\$218
7	Spring Mix	\$170
8	Salad Products	\$122
9	Miscellaneous Vegetables	\$116
10	Spinach	\$109

Source: Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner. *Monterey County Crop Report 2006*. Salinas, CA. 2007.

Table 4.2-3. Selected Monterey County Agricultural Crop Production (2006)

Crop	Monterey County Rank in State	Percent of State Production (%)
Artichokes	1	83.3
Spinach	1	59.6
Lettuce	1	65.6
Cauliflower	1	54.9
Cabbage	1	36.1
Broccoli	1	43.0
Mushrooms	1	44.1
Strawberries	1	32.8
Misc Salad Greens	1	92.2
Celery	2	33.6
Asparagus	2	20.4
Nursery products	2	8.7
Carrots	2	3.2

Source: California Department of Food and Agriculture. *California Agricultural Resource Directory 2007*. Sacramento, CA. 2007

Table 4.2-4 illustrates the changes in the county's most popular crops. Although some select agricultural crops have decreased in production numbers, overall agricultural production has increased substantially in the region over the past 20 years. Changes in production of a given crop generally reflect market forces, as farmers seek to maximize profits, but do not indicate whether particular land is

no longer being devoted to agriculture. Farmers change the type of crop grown on a particular piece of agricultural land from year to year and season to season, depending upon their anticipation of production costs, market demands, and prices. The 2006 data is assumed to represent existing conditions for purposes of this EIR.

Table 4.2-4. Agricultural Commodity Trends

Crop	Acreage			
	1985	1995	2005	2006
Artichokes	9,189	6,344	6,081	7,242
Broccoli	54,805	61,447	38,863	38,215
Cauliflower	22,415	23,569	16,380	15,195
Celery	5,410	7,445	10,138	8,491
Grapes	28,647	30,483	38,179	38,165
Lettuce	133,017	105,592	149,615	169,263
Nursery products	967	1,575	1,123	1,220
Spinach	3,046	8,700	16,937	7,638
Strawberries	3,500	7,022	8,820	9,295

Sources: Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office. *Monterey County 2005 Crop Report*. 2006.

Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner. *Monterey County Crop Report 2006*. 2007.

4.2.3.3 Agricultural Land Use

The conservation of quality agricultural lands has sustained the economic feasibility of agriculture in Monterey County. Table 4.2-5 summarizes the various types of farmland in Monterey County, as inventoried by the California Department of Conservation’s Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (refer to Section 4.2.2, Regulatory Framework, for further category definitions and discussion of this program). “Important Farmland” consists of “Prime Farmland,” “Farmland of Statewide Importance,” and “Unique Farmland.”

Table 4.2-5. Agricultural Land Use Summary

Land Use Category	Acres			Percent Change 1984–2006 (%)
	1984	1994	2006	
Prime Farmland	176,779	174,681	167,636	-5.2
Farmland of Statewide Importance	37,762	37,961	43,402	+14.9
Unique Farmland	10,875	13,074	25,104	+131.0
Important Farmland subtotal	225,416	225,716	236,142	+4.6
Grazing Land	1,081,510	1,080,452	1,065,577	-1.5
Agricultural Land subtotal	1,306,926	1,306,168	1,301,719	-0.04
Urban Land	42,374	47,112	55,951	+32.0
Other	765,284	761,302	757,210	-1.1
Water	6,544	6,545	6,246	-4.6
Total Land	2,121,128	2,121,128	2,121,128	

Sources: California Department of Conservation. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. *Monterey County Historic Land Use Conversion. 1982 to Present*. Accessed: http://redirect.conservation.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/pubs/1984-Present/mnt_1984-Present.xls.

California Department of Conservation. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. *Monterey County Important Farmland Data Availability. Land Use Conversion Table 2004–2006*. This table is available online through the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program: http://redirect.conservation.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/county_info_results.asp.

As a percentage of total land in Monterey County, agricultural uses have held constant at more than 61% for the past 20 years. While several thousand acres of agricultural land were converted to urban uses during that period, land continues to be brought into production, and, as of 2006, urban uses represent less than 3% of total land use in Monterey County. Table 4.2-6 summarizes land use as a percentage of the total area of Monterey County.

Table 4.2-6. Land Use as a Percentage of Monterey County Area

Land Use	1984	1994	2006
Important Farmland	10.6	10.6	11.1
Grazing Land	51.0	50.9	50.2
Agricultural Land total	61.6	61.5	61.3
Urban Land	2.0	2.2	2.6

Source: California Department of Conservation. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. *Monterey County Important Farmland Data Availability. 1984-2006 Land Use Summary*. Accessed: http://redirect.conservation.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/pubs/1984-Present/mnt_1984-Present.xls.

Loss of Important Farmland

An issue of concern in Monterey County is the conversion of agricultural land to urban uses. Table 4.2-7 summarizes the acreage of agricultural land that has been converted to urban uses between 1992 and 2006. However, as was noted earlier, the percent of land in Monterey County in agricultural use has remained constant, at approximately 61% over the past 20 years because other lands have been brought into agricultural use, even as others have been converted to urban uses.

Table 4.2-7. Agricultural Land Converted to Urban Uses (1992–2006)

Agricultural Land Use	Acres Converted to Urban Uses							Total
	1992– 1994	1994– 1996	1996– 1998	1998– 2000	2000– 2002	2002– 2004	2004– 2006	
Prime Farmland	255	948	1,176	737	335	123	211	3,785
Farmland of Statewide Importance	26	261	126	47	36	11	26	533
Unique Farmland	2	30	48	12	20	21	18	151
Important Farmland subtotal	283	1,239	1,350	790	391	155	151	4,463
Grazing Land	63	162	519	919	213	0	277	2,153
Agricultural Land total	346	1,401	1,869	1,709	604	155	412	6,616

Source: California Department of Conservation. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. *Monterey County Important Farmland Data Availability. Land Use Conversion Tables: 1992–1994, 1994–1996, 1996–1998, 1998–2000, 2000–2002, and 2002–2004, 2004–2006.* These seven tables are available online through the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program: http://redirect.conservation.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/county_info_results.asp.

A net total of 6,616 acres of agricultural land was converted to urban uses between 1992 and 2006. Of this figure, 4,463 acres (67.5%) was classified as Important Farmland. This equates to an average loss of approximately 319 acres of Important Farmland per year. The percent of lands in agricultural use, as shown in Table 4.2-6, has remained constant at more than 61%.

4.2.4 Regulatory Framework

4.2.4.1 Federal and State

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) was established in 1982 to track changes in agricultural land uses over time. It continues the farmland mapping efforts initiated in 1975 by the Soil Conservation Service

(since renamed Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS]) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Important Farmland Maps produced under the FMMP identify five farmland categories: Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land. Each of these categories is summarized below, as excerpted from *A Guide to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program* (1994), prepared by the California Department of Conservation.

- **Prime Farmland**—Land with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain the long-term production of agricultural crops. These lands have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields.
- **Unique Farmland**—Land of less quality soils used for the production of the State’s leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards, as found in some climactic zones in California.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance**—Land similar to Prime Farmland, but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to hold and store moisture.
- **Farmland of Local Importance**—Land of importance in the local agricultural economy, as determined by each county’s Board of Supervisors and a local advisory committee. Monterey County does not have any land designated as Farmland of Local Importance.
- **Grazing Land**—Areas covered by vegetation, both natural and cultivated, that are suited to the grazing of livestock.

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act, also known as the Williamson Act, was adopted in 1965. This voluntary tax incentive program allows the owners of land within established agricultural preserves who agree to maintain their land in agricultural use to have their property assessed based on its agricultural production, rather than the current market value. The property owner is thus relieved of having to pay higher property taxes as long as the land remains in agricultural production. The purpose of the Williamson Act is to encourage participating property owners to continue to farm their land, and to prevent the premature conversion of farmland to urban uses.

The Williamson Act applies to both prime and non-prime agricultural lands. As a result, agricultural uses on contracted lands range from intensive agriculture to grazing. Lands under contract may also support uses that are “compatible with the agricultural, recreational, or open-space use of the land” subject to the contract (Government Code Section 51201[e]). Monterey has identified the following “compatible uses”:

- Drying, packing, or other processing of an agricultural commodity usually performed on the premises where it is produced.

- Structures necessary and incidental to the agricultural use of the land.
- Single-family dwellings incidental to the agricultural use of the land for the residence of the owner and family of the owner or lessee of the land.
- Dwellings for persons employed by the owner or lessee (and their families) incidental to the agricultural use of the land.
- An aircraft landing strip incidental to the agricultural use of the land.
- Erection, constriction, alteration, or maintenance of gas, electric, water or communication utility facilities.
- Erection, constriction, alteration, or maintenance of radio, television or microwave antennae, transmitters, and related facilities.
- Public or private hunting clubs and accessory structures.
- Public or private hunting of wildlife or fishing.
- Public or private shooting range, archery range, or other similar use.
- Public or private riding or hiking trails.
- Removal of natural materials.
- Disposal of specified oil field wastes, when in accordance with all required local and state permits.

When a land owner enters into a Williamson Act contract with the County, the land is restricted to agricultural and compatible uses for at least 10 years. Williamson Act contracts are automatically renewed annually for an additional one-year period, unless the property owner applies for non-renewal. The Williamson Act also contains limited provisions for cancellation of contracts by the Board of Supervisors and a substantial penalty for the cancellation is assessed. Non-renewal is the preferred method of ending a contract; cancellation is intended only for unusual situations (*Sierra Club v. City of Hayward* [1981] 28 Cal.3d 840). The specific findings to justify cancellation are extremely difficult to make, and contracts are rarely cancelled in Monterey County.

Alternatively, under the Williamson Act, a landowner may enter into a contract with the County placing their land within a Farmland Security Zone. The Farmland Security Zone offers a greater property tax reduction in exchange for agreeing to a longer minimum term on the contract (20 years, rather than the 10 years otherwise provided under the Williamson Act). If an existing Williamson Act contract is being converted to a Farmland Security Zone, the Board of Supervisors will rescind the existing contract upon approving the Zone. Non-renewal or cancellation procedures for Farmland Security Zone contracts are similar to those for the Williamson Act; however, cancellation is also subject to approval by the Director of the California Department of Conservation.

In 2007, 763,396 acres of land in Monterey County were under Williamson Act contract, with an additional 31,278 acres under the more restrictive Farmland Security Zone (Department of Conservation 2008c). The 763,396 acres under these enforceable restrictions represent an 11% increase over the 1991 total.

Table 4.2-8 summarizes the change in Williamson Act acreage between 1991 and 2007.

Table 4.2-8. Change in Williamson Act Contract Acreage (1991–2007)

Acres of Land under Williamson Act Contract		Change (acres) (Percent Change [%])
1991	2007	
686,466	763,396	+76,930 (+11%)

Department of Conservation. 2008c. Williamson Act Program Reports and Statistics. Enrollment Summaries and Trends. County information available online at: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/lca/stats_reports/Pages/index.aspx

Exhibit 4.2.2 depicts the locations of parcels in Monterey County with active Williamson Act contracts, as of 2004, which is the latest year for which geographic information systems (GIS) data is available showing the location of Williamson Act contracts.

4.2.5 Project Impacts

This section describes the CEQA impact analysis relating to agricultural resources for the Project and alternatives. It describes the methods used to determine the Project’s impacts and lists the thresholds used to conclude whether an impact would be significant. Measures to mitigate (avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, eliminate, or compensate for) significant impacts accompany each impact discussion.

4.2.5.1 Methodology

Using the criteria for determining significance described below, analysis of the agricultural effects of the project are based on the location and designation of the farmland in the county. Important Farmland as well as land zoned for farming and land under Williamson contract were specifically analyzed. Additionally, the location of other development in relation to farmland in the county was also used to analyze impacts. A qualitative analysis is provided to determine whether the development and land use activities contemplated by the 2007 General Plan would create substantial impact on farmland in the county.

4.2.5.2 Thresholds of Significance

Thresholds of Significance under CEQA

The State CEQA Guidelines were used to determine whether the proposed action would have a significant environmental effect. The proposed action may have a significant effect on visual resources under CEQA if it would:

- convert Prime, Unique, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (collectively Important Farmland) to non-agricultural use;
- conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; or
- involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, would result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use.

4.2.5.3 Impact Analysis

Implementation of the 2007 General Plan to the 2030 and 2092 planning horizons could result in impacts to Important Farmland, land zoned for farming, land under Williamson Act/Farmland Security Zone contract and other existing farmland.

Loss of Important Farmland

Impact AG-1: Implementation of the 2007 General Plan would result in the conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use. (Significant Unavoidable Impact.)

2030 Planning Horizon

Impact of Development with Policies

Implementation of the 2007 General Plan would result in a net loss of Important Farmland within the county. As of 2006, there were approximately 236,142 acres of Important Farmland in Monterey County, as mapped by the California Department of Conservation. Of this acreage, 233,571 acres are in an agricultural (e.g., Farmland) or agricultural supporting (Agricultural Industrial) land use designation of the 2007 General Plan. The remaining 2,571 acres are contemplated to be converted to urban uses by the 2007 General Plan. Note that this figure includes approximately 476 acres of Important Farmland that are within the Sphere of Influence of the cities. Table 4.2-9 summarizes the net loss of Important Farmland that would occur from implementation of the General Plan. It is expected that most of the conversion of Important Farmland in the unincorporated county

would occur in the Boronda, Castroville, Chualar, and Pajaro Community Areas.

The exact amount of conversion that would occur by 2030 was not estimated. Table 4.2-9 shows the total amount of conversion that would occur through buildout. Conversion by 2030 would be somewhat less than this total.

Table 4.2-9. Change in Net Important Farmland Acreage

Existing Important Farmland (2006)	Important Farmland within a Proposed Agricultural Land Use Designation	Important Farmland Removed from Agricultural Land Use Designation
236,142 acres	233,571 acres	2,571 acres

Sources: California Department of Conservation. Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. Monterey County Important Farmland Data Availability. *Land Use Conversion Table 2004–2006*. This table is available online through the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program: http://redirect.conservation.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/county_info_results.asp.
County of Monterey. *2007 General Plan*. 2007.

While the loss of 2,571 acres of Important Farmland would represent only about one percent of the total Important Farmland acreage in Monterey County, this is considered significant because the land would be permanently removed from agricultural production.

2007 General Plan Policies

The 2007 General Plan and Area Plan policies summarized below set forth comprehensive measures to avoid and minimize adverse impacts on conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural uses to the maximum extent practicable.

Land Use Element

Land Use Element Policies LU-1.1 through LU-1.5 and LU-1.7 through LU-1.9 promote general land use concepts that emphasize city-centered growth and discourage conversion of prime agricultural lands to urban uses. Policies LU-1.1 (requires that the type, location, timing, and intensity of growth in the unincorporated area be managed), LU-1.2 (discourages premature and scattered development), LU-1.3 (stipulates that balanced development of the county be assured through designating adequate land for a range of future land uses), LU-1.4 (limits growth to areas where an adequate level of services and facilities exists or can be assured concurrent with growth and development), LU-1.5 (requires that land uses be designated to achieve compatibility with adjacent uses), LU-1.7 (allows for clustering of residential development to those portions of the property most suitable for development), LU-1.8 (encourages voluntary reduction or limitation of development potential in the

rural and agricultural areas through dedication of scenic or conservation easements, transfer of development rights, and other appropriate techniques), and LU-1.9 (prioritizes infill of vacant non-agricultural lands in existing developed areas and new development within designated urban service areas) are intended to ensure that growth in the unincorporated county would occur in a planned fashion and would be compatible with existing land uses. These policies discourage urban development outside of the incorporated cities, except within identified Community Areas and Rural Centers. As much of the agricultural land in the county occurs in unincorporated areas, these policies serve to limit development in agricultural areas and conserve prime agricultural lands thereby reducing the potential for impacts of their conversion to non-agricultural uses.

Agricultural Element

Agricultural Element Policies AG-1.1 through AG-1.12 establish land use guidelines designed to preserve existing agricultural operations, particularly those located on Important Farmland. Policies AG-1.1 (prohibits land uses that would interfere with routine and ongoing agricultural operations on viable farmlands), AG-1.2 (establishes a regulatory framework allowing for the use of agricultural buffers to protect existing agricultural operations), AG-1.3 (limits the subdivision of Important Farmland and land designated as Farmlands, Permanent Grazing, or Rural Grazing), AG-1.4 (requires that viable agricultural land uses on Important Farmland be conserved, enhanced, and expanded through agricultural land use designations and encouragement of large-lot agricultural zoning), AG-1.5 (encourages the use of tax and economic incentives for farms and ranches), AG-1.6 (allows farm worker housing in areas designated for agricultural land use, under certain conditions), AG-1.7 (encourages the clustering of residential uses accessory to the agricultural use of the land in locations that will have minimal impact on the most productive land), AG-1.8 (requires that discretionary development projects on agricultural lands be reviewed by the County's Agricultural Advisory Committee), AG-1.9 (allows agricultural operations to be protected from nuisance claims), AG-1.11 (stipulates that permits for agricultural activities be integrated with applicable Resource Conservation District permit coordination (streamlining) programs), AG-1.12 (requires the County to establish a program to mitigate the loss of Important Farmland when a proposed change of land use designation would result in the loss of Important Farmland (as mapped by the California Department of Conservation), including annexation of agricultural land to an incorporated area) set forth general measures to promote the long-term protection and conservation of existing productive agricultural lands. Further, the policies ensure that surrounding uses are compatible with agricultural land uses. Implementation of these

policies would promote protection of agricultural areas from conversion to non-agricultural uses.

Agricultural Element Policies AG-2.1 through AG-2.4, and AG-2.8 and AG-2.9 identify measures to promote the viability and financial feasibility of agricultural business in the county. These policies define appropriate and compatible uses of agricultural lands. Policies AG-2.1 (allows agricultural support facilities serving onsite and offsite farming and ranching activities to be established in the Farmlands, Permanent Grazing, and Rural Grazing land use designations), AG-2.2 (encourages the establishment and retention of a broad range of agricultural support businesses and services to enhance the full development potential of the agricultural industry in the county), AG-2.3 (allows agricultural processing facilities to be developed in the Farmlands, Permanent Grazing, and Rural Grazing land use designations, where compatible and appropriate), AG-2.4 (requires agriculture-related enterprises and agricultural support uses to be sited and designed to minimize the loss of productive agricultural lands and to minimize impacts on surrounding land uses), AG-2.8 (restricts compatible recreational uses to those that do not adversely impact long-term productivity of onsite or adjacent agricultural uses), and AG-2.9 (allows onsite farm equipment storage facilities within agricultural land use designations) reduce the potential for impacts to agricultural land by maintaining the viability of agricultural activities.

Agricultural Element Policies AG-3.1 through AG-3.3 are designed to prevent inappropriate limitations on routine and ongoing agricultural activities. Policies AG-3.1 (permits routine and ongoing agricultural activities, and stipulates that activities with the potential for significant impacts are subject to a greater level of review), AG-3.2 (encourages cooperation between the County, the agricultural industry, and state and federal agencies to streamline permit procedures for routine and ongoing agricultural activities), and AG-3.3 (identifies a non-exclusive list of routine and ongoing agricultural activities that the county may consider for exemption from selected General Plan policies based on development of an ordinance in order to provide flexibility for agricultural operations to continue in the county and to meet the changing demands of both regional and global competition) support typical, routine agricultural activities in a manner that would reduce the potential for agricultural land conversion by allowing for their continuation and economic viability.

Area Plan Policies

Supplemental policies in the North County (Inland) Area Plan, Greater Salinas Area Plan, Central Salinas Valley Area Plan, Carmel Valley Master Plan, Toro Area Plan, Cachagua Area Plan, and South County

Area Plan are designed to preserve existing agricultural land uses and to allow new, expanded permitted agricultural uses in these areas.

North County Area Plan

North County Area Plan Policy NC-1.2 (allows commercial mushroom growing operations to increase production, subject to a use permit) and Policy NC-1.3 (promotes the preservation and enhancement of large acreages in higher elevations and on steeper slopes for grazing) reduces the potential for conversion of farmland by supporting expansion of agricultural uses. Policy NC-6.1 (land designated for farmland and grazing uses be assessed and taxed accordingly) would allow more secure tax benefits for farmland and grazing, which would encourage the conservation of those uses by the owners.

Greater Salinas Area Plan

Greater Salinas Area Plan Policy GS-1.1 (specific agricultural buffers in the Butterfly Village Special Treatment Area) would reduce potential conversion impacts by establishing buffers in the Butterfly Village Special Treatment Area. Policies GS-1.3 (restrictions for visiting farms on the agricultural property in the Highway 68/Foster Road Special Treatment Area) and GS-1.5 (encourage commercial uses which support farm activities near Highway 68 and the Salinas River) reduce potential conversion impacts by taking measures to protect and support agricultural uses in the Special Treatment Area. Policies GS-1.7 (Spence/Potter/Encinal Road Study Area new development requirements), GS-1.8 (town of Spreckels may be developed as agriculturally related commercial uses), GS-1.9 (town of Spreckels industrial development requirements), GS-1.10 (Special Treatment Area designation at Natividad/Rogge Road to permit soil dependent agricultural operations), and GS-1.11 (establish Espinosa Road Study Area to potentially encourage more intensive agricultural uses and businesses) identify specific parcels and/or locations, and either require or encourage future development on these sites to preserve existing agricultural uses (if present) or ensure compatibility with adjacent agricultural uses (if present). With their support of potential future agricultural development, these policies would reduce the potential conversion of agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses. Policy GS-6.1 (promotes the donation of development rights on agricultural land to a duly established Farmland Trust or other qualified organization that meets the criteria of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code), Policy GS-6.2 (allows accessory uses on agricultural land that maintain the viability of continued agricultural production) and Policy GS-6.3 (sets forth standards for support facilities on agricultural land that would ensure compatibility with agricultural production) establish standards that promote

continuation of agricultural uses, which reduces the potential for agricultural land conversion to non-agricultural uses.

Central Salinas Valley Area Plan

Implementation of Central Salinas Valley Area Plan Policies CSV-1.3 (specific development requirements for the Spence/Potter/Encinal Road area that would allow for alternative land uses to support the agricultural industry) and CSV-1.4 (details of requirements for various studies to ensure that surrounding agricultural uses in the Spence/Potter/Encinal Road area would not be adversely affected) would provide protection for agricultural land to reduce potential conversion impacts in the plan area.

Carmel Valley Master Plan

Carmel Valley Master Plan Policy CV-6 (future development adjacent to agricultural lands must be planned to minimize adverse effects on the productivity of the agricultural soils) and policy CV-6.3 (croplands and orchards be retained for agricultural use and promotes the use of low-density, clustered development to preserve agricultural lands) establish protections that reduce the potential for conversion of agricultural land.

Toro Area Plan

Toro Area Plan Policy T-3.6 (preservation and enhancement of large acreages in higher elevations and on steeper slopes for grazing) protects agricultural land and would subsequently reduce impacts from conversion of agricultural land.

Cachagua Area Plan

Cachagua Area Plan Policy CACH-2.3 (private airstrips and agricultural landing fields must have a use permit and be controlled to ensure that they do not permanently preclude cultivation of Farmlands of Local Importance) protects potential uses of land for agricultural production.

South County Area Plan

South County Area Plan Policy SC-1.2 (encourages clustered development in all areas where development is permitted) and policy SC-6.1 (promotes the conservation of irrigated and non-irrigated farmlands) promote preservation of agricultural land. Policy SC-1.3 (supports policies and programs such as large lot zoning and agricultural land trusts) would reduce pressure to convert farmland to non-agricultural uses by enhancing the competitive capabilities of farms and ranches.

Agricultural Winery Corridor Plan

The AWCP included in the 2007 General Plan is designed to promote development of an integrated wine industry in Monterey County. Monterey County has nine approved American Viticulture Area appellations, and the proposed AWCP includes much of the Monterey appellation plus the areas of Santa Lucia Highlands, Arroyo Seco, Chalone, San Lucas, San Bernabe, Hames Valley, and San Antonio Valley (Monterey County Vinters and Growers Association 2008). The only approved appellation not included in the AWCP is Carmel Valley. The AWCP designates a winery corridor within portions of three planning areas: Toro, Central Salinas Valley, and South County. The 2007 General Plan sets general land use policies to guide the establishment of a defined number of wineries and tasting rooms within each segment of the corridor.

Agricultural Element Goal AG-4 and its corresponding policies (AG-4.1 through AG-4.4) establish the framework for the Agricultural Winery Corridor Plan (AWCP), and support the marketing and promotion of the area as a wine industry. The policies establish guidelines to balance the needs of tourism, marketing, and wine processing capacity.

The AWCP would authorize up to 40 artisan wineries, 10 full-scale wineries, and 10 tasting rooms within the corridors, as well as supporting activities and bed and breakfast inns as discussed below. The 2007 General Plan and its AWCP policies include standards that regulate the size and location of wineries; they are designed to allow for development of an AWCP that is consistent with the existing agricultural land uses. Development standards under Section 3.5 of the AWCP limit minimum parcel size within the corridor to 5 acres, and then only under specified circumstances. It limits building site coverage to 30% of the total site; building height to 35 feet and, for processing facilities, 45 feet; requires wineries to be set back at least 100 feet from property lines and 200 feet from a private residence, with greater setbacks when tasting rooms, retail sales, tours, or special events are included in the winery; and establishes minimum parking requirements.

Moreover, policies AG-4.1 (support of development of a fully integrated wine industry), AG-4.2 (establishment of a winery corridor), AG-4.3 (development and maintenance of an AWCP), and AG-4.4 (wineries are allowed outside the winery corridor subject to conformance with zoning) ensure that winery land uses remain consistent and compatible with surrounding land uses in agricultural production. A total of three restaurants, five delicatessens, and eight inns would also be allowed under the AWCP. Each segment of the winery corridor would have a maximum number of each type of

development. In addition, one consolidated area may be identified for a wine-related business cluster. No specific locations have been identified for any of these future uses.

Most of the area within the AWCP boundaries contains cultivated fields or grazing land. Nearly all of the cultivated fields are identified as Important Farmland by the California Department of Conservation. A significant percentage of the lands along the River Road/Arroyo Seco Road/Central Avenue and Metz Road corridors are encumbered by Williamson Act contracts, with a smaller percentage of the lands along Jolon Road under these contracts. Note that portions of the corridor in and around the cities of Soledad and Greenfield are encumbered by Farmland Security Zone contracts, which confer a greater degree of protection than standard Williamson Act contracts. Agricultural and winery uses are generally consistent with the Williamson Act; however, uses such as restaurants and bed and breakfast facilities are not. (See discussion under Impact AG-2.)

Implementation of the AWCP would promote the continued cultivation of Important Farmland in Monterey County by facilitating planned development of wineries that would produce wine products from locally grown grapes. Development of wineries would enhance the economic viability of agriculture by providing an additional income stream and reduce economic pressures to convert agricultural land to urban uses, which would ultimately preserve Important Farmland.

Significance Determination

Development and land use activities contemplated by the 2007 General Plan would result in the significant and unavoidable conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural uses. A total of 2,571 acres of Important Farmland are anticipated to be permanently and irreversibly converted to urban uses. Implementation of the 2007 General Plan and Area Plan policies would ensure that conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural uses is minimized to the maximum extent possible through (1) land use concepts such as city-centered growth and clustered development to provide for housing opportunities as required under California Planning Law, and (2) programs that promote the conservation of viable agricultural land, including the AWCP.

Policies AG-1.1 through AG-1.4, described above, partially mitigate this impact by helping protect and preserve agricultural lands. The requirements of the prospective mitigation program to be developed under Policy 1.12 to protect remaining Important Farmland permanently would partially reduce the significance of this impact. However, because the requirements are yet to be determined, the effectiveness of that program cannot be known at this time. In addition or moreover, the loss of Important Farmland cannot be

mitigated to a level of insignificance once land is permanently converted to non-agricultural land use; therefore, such loss is a significant unavoidable impact associated with implementation of the 2007 General Plan.

The AWCP encompasses large acreages of Important Farmland. Implementation of the AWCP would facilitate development of up to 40 artisan wineries, 10 full-scale wineries, and 10 stand-alone tasting rooms, as well as restaurants, inns, bed and breakfast inns, and a business cluster. The County Zoning Ordinance allows bed and breakfast inns within the “F” Farmland Zoning District upon approval of a conditional use permit (Chapter 21.30, Title 21, Monterey County Code). The other uses are not allowed and would require a zoning change. The potential impacts of any future restaurants, inns, or the business cluster cannot be determined at this time because their sizes, intensities, and locations are unknown. However, the provisions of the AWCP would require setbacks from adjoining agricultural lands, as well as limit the size of any new parcels created for AWCP activities to at least 5 acres.

When approved, development of these uses would be consistent with the agricultural land use designations of the parcels on which they would be located. As discussed in Section 4.9, Biological Resources, new vineyards are likely to be established on lands currently devoted to grazing, thereby expanding the amount of Important Farmland. Moreover, these uses would inherently support agriculture and enhance the long-term economic viability of agriculture in Monterey County. Therefore, Important Farmland land would not be lost, but would be enhanced by implementation of the AWCP.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation beyond the 2007 General Plan policies is feasible.

Significance Conclusion

Implementation of the 2007 General Plan would result in the loss of Important Farmland. Although implementation of the 2007 General Plan policies discussed above would reduce this impact, they would not reduce it to a less-than-significant level, and no additional mitigation is feasible.

Buildout

Impact of Development with Policies

Buildout to the 2092 General Plan could result in the conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural uses. It is somewhat speculative to evaluate the specific potential impacts of conversion related to ultimate buildout of all residential lots in the county because the buildout year (2092) occurs over 100 years in the future. However, given projected population increases, the trend of agricultural conversion to urban uses is expected to continue, as the population in the county grows. Urban uses will displace agricultural use, particularly in the cities, Community Areas, and Rural Communities of

Monterey County. Unless a substantial new source of water is tapped for the Monterey Peninsula, most new urban development will occur inland where agricultural land is most prevalent.

The availability of water will be a decisive factor in future agricultural use. The Salinas Valley Water Project Zone 2C area of benefit encompasses approximately 240,180 acres of farmland and 45,500 acres of grazing land. The EIR prepared for the Salinas Valley Water Project projects that by 2030 there will be a net loss of agricultural land due to urbanization. The availability of water to what is now grazing lands offers some opportunity for conversion of grazing land to irrigated agricultural land in the longer term future, despite the projections of the Salinas Valley Water Project EIR. The extent to which that might occur cannot be known at this time.

Among the factors that might affect this trend either by reducing or expanding the extent of conversion are future changes to State law regarding the conversion of agricultural land; future regulation of development to reduce greenhouse gas production that would otherwise result from scattered land use patterns; competition for water supplies (particularly since future water supplies will probably be similar to those today); the viability of foreign and domestic markets for agricultural products that are capable of being grown in Monterey County (e.g., county growers' future success in competitive markets); future mobility (e.g., whether movement of goods and people will be easier or more difficult than today); and future environmental regulations that may affect commercial agricultural practices by raising the cost of production or making certain crops impractical to grow. The effects of these factors, if any, on the conversion of agricultural land are not known and cannot be known at this time.

2007 General Plan Policies

The 2007 General Plan contains goals and policies that address agricultural resources impacts from buildout of the 2007 General Plan; see discussion above under "2030 Planning Horizon".

Significance Determination

Buildout by 2092 would potentially result in adverse impacts to Important Farmland assuming that current trends continue. However, the 2007 General Plan and Area Plan policies set forth comprehensive measures to avoid and minimize adverse impacts on farmland to the maximum extent practicable. The 2007 General Plan employs land use concepts such as city-centered growth and clustered development to provide for housing opportunities as required under California Planning Law and programs that promote the conservation of viable agricultural land, including the AWCP to minimize conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural uses to the maximum extent possible. Given that the buildout of the 2007 General Plan would not occur until 2092 and that there are many factors, as described above, that could change by then which would dictate the significance of Important

Farmland conversion, it is not possible to precisely determine the impacts from conversion in 2092 nor is it feasible to devise mitigation measures to be implemented at that time. However, given current trends, the significance of impacts are expected to be significant and unavoidable.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation beyond the 2007 General Plan policies is feasible because the future economic and physical environment cannot be known at this time.

Significance Conclusion

Buildout by 2092 would result in adverse impacts to Important Farmland. The possible impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Agricultural Use Zoning and Williamson Act Contracts

Impact AG-2: Implementation of the 2007 General Plan would result in conflicts with existing zoning for agricultural use or Williamson Act contracts. (Less Than Significant Impact.)

This impact is not the same as the conversion of agricultural land. Conflict with existing zoning or a Williamson Act contract would occur if the 2007 General Plan would allow incompatible uses on agriculturally zoned or contracted lands. Allowing compatible uses on Williamson Act lands would not result in a conflict, nor would the termination of Williamson Act contracts in accordance with the procedures for termination set out in the Williamson Act.

2030 Planning Horizon

Impact of Development with Policies

Implementation of the 2007 General Plan to the 2030 planning horizon would not result in conflicts with Williamson Act contracts within the county. Williamson Act contract acreage (including lands within Farmland Security Zones) increased by 76,930 acres (11%) from 1991 to 2007, totaling approximately 763,396 acres of agricultural land under Williamson Act contracts in unincorporated Monterey County.

The latest year of GIS data available for Williamson Act contracts is 2004. Using the 2004 data, the 2007 GP would ultimately result in conversion of 6,874 acres under Williamson Act contract to urban uses. Note that this figure includes 299 acres of Williamson Act land that is within the Sphere of Influence of the cities. A city's Sphere of Influence describes the area that would eventually be annexed to the city. Agricultural lands within a Sphere of Influence can be expected to eventually convert to urban use and the Williamson Act contract would either be non-renewed or cancelled prior to that time.

The county does not allow non-compatible uses within lands under Williamson Act contract. Contract cancellations are rarely approved by Monterey County, and then only in strict adherence to Williamson Act findings requirements and recognizing the role of the Department of Conservation in overseeing cancellations of Farmland Security Zones. The eventual termination of contracts as cities begin to annex the land within their Spheres of Influence will also occur in accordance with statute.

2007 General Plan Policies

The 2007 General Plan contains goals and policies that minimize conflicts with Williamson Act contracts. The applicable goals are included in the summary of the Land Use Element and Agricultural Element policies under Impact AG-1. Note that Williamson Act contracts (including Farmland Security Zones) are the premiere tax incentive for the preservation of agricultural lands, and are thus the primary target for Agricultural Element Policy AG-1.5 (encourages the use of tax and economic incentives to enhance the competitive capabilities of farms and ranches in order to promote long-term conservation, enhancement, and expansion of viable agricultural lands). This policy would encourage owners to continue agricultural uses and Williamson Act contracts on their property.

Area Plan Policies

The Area Plan supplemental policies listed under Impact AG-1 establish specific measures to promote the conservation of agricultural lands. Conservation of these lands would reduce pressures to convert farmland to non-agricultural uses. Additional applicable policies are listed below.

North County Area Plan

North County Area Plan Policy NC-6.1 (summarized above in Impact AG-1) would allow more secure tax benefits for farmland and grazing, which would encourage the conservation of those uses by the owners.

Policy AG-1.4 (provides that viable agricultural land uses will be conserved, enhanced, and expanded through land use designations and encouragement of large lot agricultural zoning, and establishes agriculture as the top land use priority for guiding further economic development on agricultural lands) helps protect the economic viability of Williamson Act contracted lands, which would result in less threat of conversion of such lands.

Agricultural Winery Corridor Plan

Parcels within the boundaries of the AWCP are under Williamson Act contracts. The Williamson Act authorizes the Board of

Supervisors to adopt rules governing its administration, subject to certification by the State Department of Conservation. One limitation of a Williamson Act contract is a requirement to retain an economically viable agricultural operation. A second limitation is a minimum parcel size of 10 acres.

AWCP development proposals on Williamson Act properties would not include uses that are inconsistent with the Williamson Act. Certain types of facilities allowed under the AWCP, such as wineries, tasting rooms, and restaurants and bed-and-breakfasts, would require prior approval of a conditional use permit before they may be allowed within an agricultural area. Because they are not considered “compatible uses” under the County’s Williamson Act program these uses would not be allowed on Williamson Act-contracted land. Put another way, Williamson Act contracted land would not be available for these uses. Based on the County’s past strict interpretation of contract cancellation requirements and Department of Conservation oversight, contract cancellations to allow these uses are unlikely to be proposed on contracted lands and, if proposed, would not be approved. The AWCP allows creation of 5-acre parcels. However, because the Williamson Act limits the size of contracted parcels to 10 acres, no contracted land would be subdivided into such small parcels.

Significance Determination

Implementation of the 2007 General Plan, including Area Plans, would result in the eventual conversion of Williamson Act-contracted farmland to non-agricultural uses. This is expected primarily to occur where future planned development would be in close proximity to agricultural lands, including areas in or around the city Spheres of Influence, the Castroville, Chualar, and Pajaro Community Areas and the San Lucas Rural Center. Because incompatible uses would be precluded within the AWCP and would therefore be located on non-contracted land, impacts on Williamson Act properties associated with AWCP development would be less than significant. Implementation of the 2007 General Plan and Area Plan policies described above would ensure that conversion of Williamson Act farmland to non-agricultural uses is minimized to the greatest extent possible through the use of land use concepts such as city-centered growth, clustered development, and programs that promote the conservation of Williamson Act farmland. Any termination of Williamson Act contracts would be undertaken consistently with the provisions of the Act. Overall, the amount of agricultural land in the county is expected to remain steady, or decline slightly, to the 2030 planning horizon. This would be a less than significant impact associated with implementation of the 2007 General Plan.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation beyond the 2007 General Plan policies is necessary.

Significance Conclusion

Implementation of the 2007 General Plan goals and policies would result in a less-than-significant impact.

Buildout

Impact of Development with Policies

Buildout to the 2092 General Plan would not result in conflicts with Williamson Act contracted land. As stated above in the “Buildout” analysis under Impact AG-1, it is somewhat speculative to evaluate the specific potential impacts to agriculture related to ultimate buildout of all residential lots in the county. The trend of agricultural conversion to urban uses is expected to continue, as the population in the county grows and urban uses will displace agricultural use, particularly in the cities, Community Areas, and Rural Centers of Monterey County. As a result, by buildout, agricultural land (and by proxy Williamson Act land) will decline in area. There is no reason to expect, however, that the County’s approach to administering the Williamson Act would substantially change.

2007 General Plan Policies

The 2007 General Plan contains goals and policies that address agricultural resources impacts from buildout of the 2007 General Plan; see discussion above under “2030 Planning Horizon”.

Significance Determination

Buildout by 2092 would not result in conflicts with Williamson Act contracted land. Implementation of the 2007 General Plan and Area Plan policies described above would ensure that conversion of Williamson Act farmland to non-agricultural uses is minimized to the greatest extent possible through the use of land use concepts such as city-centered growth, clustered development, and programs that promote the conservation of Williamson Act farmland. Given that the buildout of the 2007 General Plan would not occur until 2092 and that there are many factors that could change by then which would lead to conflicts with Williamson Act contracted land, it is not possible to precisely determine the significance of impact in 2092 nor is it possible to know whether mitigation measures would be needed at that time. However, given past County practice in the implementation of the Williamson Act, the impact is expected to be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation beyond the 2007 General Plan policies is necessary.

Significance Conclusion

Buildout by 2092 would result in less than significant impacts to Williamson Act contracted land.

Conversion of Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use

Impact AG-3: Implementation of the 2007 General Plan would involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, would result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use. (Significant Unavoidable Impact.)

2030 Planning Horizon

Impact of Development with Policies

Implementation of the 2007 General Plan to the 2030 planning horizon would result in increased population growth and economic development that would create economic pressures to convert agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. Examples include land use conflicts between urban land uses and agricultural activities, competition for water supplies, and reduced air quality (as a result of urban development and traffic) that reduces crop yields.

2007 General Plan Policies

The 2007 General Plan contains goals and policies to promote the long-term preservation of agriculture in Monterey County. The applicable policies are included in the summary of the Land Use Element and Agricultural Element policies under Impact AG-1. Additional applicable policies are described below.

Land Use Element

Land Use Element Policy LU-1.5 (requires that land uses be designated to achieve compatibility with adjacent uses) and Policy LU-1.8 (encourages voluntary reduction or limitation of development potential in the rural and agricultural areas through dedication of scenic or conservation easements, transfer of development rights, and other appropriate techniques) would result in standards that separate agricultural from urban uses and thereby minimize the potential for conflicts.

Agricultural Element

Agricultural Element Policy AG-1.2 (encourages the use of land use concepts such as buffers) would reduce land use compatibility impacts between urban and agricultural land with the use of buffers.

Area Plan Policies

The Area Plan supplemental policies listed under Impact AG-1 establish specific measures to promote the conservation of agricultural lands. The conservation of these lands would reduce pressures to convert farmland to non-agricultural uses, and therefore would reduce the potential for conflicts between urban and agricultural land uses.

Agricultural Winery Corridor Plan

The AWCP is consistent with all of the 2007 General Plan goals and policies summarized under Impact AG-1. In addition, the AWCP is consistent with 2007 General Plan Policy LU-2.8 (designate and establish regulations for an Agricultural Buffer/conservation easement (AB) designation to protect existing agricultural operation), which reduce land use compatibility impacts between urban and agricultural land by encouraging the use of land use concepts such as buffers. The AWCP is also consistent with 2007 General Plan Policies associated with Goal AG 4 (summarized in Impact AG-1).

Moreover, the AWCP is consistent with the 2007 General Plan policies listed under Impact AG-1 that establish specific measures to promote the conservation of agricultural lands. The AWCP would provide nearby processing for county grapes, thereby reducing the cost of transport, as well as new economic returns from wine sales and tourism. This increases the value of vineyards and lessens economic pressures to convert that farmland to non-agricultural uses.

Significance Determination

New development permitted by the 2007 General Plan would create increased pressures to convert agricultural land uses to non-agricultural uses. However, as discussed under Impact AG-1, the 2007 General Plan and Area Plan policies emphasize the long-term preservation of agriculture in Monterey County and would ensure that such pressures are avoided to the maximum extent feasible. The 2007 General Plan policies emphasize compatibility between land uses and discourage the introduction of incompatible uses adjacent to existing land uses. The proposed policies allow for the implementation of land use planning tools such as buffers to soften the impacts between urban and agricultural land uses where these edges do occur. This is expected to minimize the adverse spillover effects of urban

development on agricultural land (e.g., light and glare, urban runoff, litter, and trespassing) to the maximum extent practicable.

Nonetheless, because it provides for additional residential development as required under State Planning Law, implementation of the 2007 General Plan would create development pressures that would result in the conversion of agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses within the cities, some Community Areas, and a Rural Center. Because no feasible mitigation is available to reduce the significance of this impact to a less-than-significant level, this would be a significant and unavoidable impact associated with implementation of the 2007 General Plan.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation beyond the 2007 General Plan policies is feasible.

Significance Conclusion

Implementation of the 2007 General Plan would result in pressure to convert agricultural land to non-agricultural uses as a result of other changes to the environment. The County has no authority to regulate land uses within the cities and so cannot stop conversions from that source. The County cannot stop new residents from moving into Monterey County. As population increases, air quality and traffic impacts will also increase, having some effect on crop yields. Although the proposed 2007 General Plan policies include provisions for reducing demand on from new residential development groundwater (Goal PS-2 and Policies PS-2.8 and PS-2.9), demand will increase over the planning period due to both new development in the cities and development of individual lots in the county. Implementation of the 2007 General Plan goals and policies would reduce impacts, but not to a less-than-significant level.

Buildout

Impact of Development with Policies

Buildout to the 2092 General Plan would result in potential conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses as a result of other changes to the environment. As stated above in the “Buildout” analysis under Impact AG-1, it is somewhat speculative to evaluate the specific potential impacts to agriculture related to ultimate buildout of all residential lots in the county. The trend of agricultural conversion to urban uses is expected to continue, as the population in the county grows and urban uses will displace agricultural use, particularly in the cities, Community Areas, and Rural Communities of Monterey County. Many factors that might affect the trend could change and the effects of these factors, if any, on the conversion of agricultural land are not known and cannot be known at this time.

2007 General Plan Policies

The 2007 General Plan contains goals and policies that address agricultural resources impacts from buildout of the 2007 General Plan; see discussion above under “2030 Planning Horizon.”

Significance Determination

Buildout by 2092 could potentially result in conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural land due to other environmental changes. However, the 2007 General Plan and Area Plan policies emphasize the long-term preservation of agriculture in Monterey County and would ensure that such pressures are avoided to the maximum extent feasible. The 2007 General Plan policies emphasize compatibility between land uses and discourage the introduction of incompatible uses adjacent to existing land uses. The proposed policies allow for the implementation of land use planning tools such as buffers to soften the impacts between urban and agricultural land uses where these edges do occur. This is expected to minimize the adverse spillover effects of urban development on agricultural land (e.g., light and glare, urban runoff, litter, and trespassing) to the maximum extent practicable. Given that the buildout of the 2007 General Plan would not occur until 2092 and that there are many factors that could change by then which would dictate the existence and conversion of agricultural land, it is not possible to determine the precise significance of impact in 2092 nor is it feasible to devise mitigation measures to be implemented at that time. However, given past trends and expected population growth, the impact is likely to be significant and unavoidable.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation beyond the 2007 General Plan policies is feasible.

Significance Conclusion

Buildout by 2092 could potentially result in conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural land due to other environmental changes. The impact will be significant and unavoidable.

4.2.6 Level of Significance after Mitigation

Conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use and conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses would lead to significant unavoidable impacts associated with implementation of the 2007 General Plan. The 2007 General Plan establishes policies and regulations to reduce such impacts, but not to a less-than-significant level. Conversions of Williamson Act contract land would be less than significant.