

Monterey County has elected to include an Agriculture Element as part of the General Plan. Agriculture consisting of crop farming and livestock grazing is the largest industry in the County and contributes a significant amount of money to Monterey County's economy. Out of approximately 1.3 million acres of County land dedicated to agriculture, most of this area (approximately 80%) is used for grazing. The most productive and lucrative farmlands in the County are located in the North County, Greater Salinas, and Central Salinas Valley Planning Areas. The main type of crop production in the County consists of cool season vegetables, strawberries, wine grapes and nursery crops.

The California Department of Conservation manages the State of California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), which evaluates productive agricultural lands. It also oversees the Williamson Act Program (California Land Conservation Act of 1965), which is designed to keep agricultural lands in production through the creation of Agricultural Preserve and Farmland Security Zones long term contracts, in return for reduced property taxes. Currently (2007) 735,000 acres of land are under Williamson Act contract in Monterey County with 32,000 acres under the Farmland Security Zone ("FSZ"). FSZs are generally required to be at least 100 acres in size and offer landowners greater property tax reduction.

In addition, Monterey County has the Monterey County Agricultural and Historical Land Conservancy, Incorporated, which was created in 1984 by Monterey County residents (currently known as the Ag Land Trust). The Ag Land Trust accepts agricultural conservation easements by gift or as a result of direct purchase from landowners to serve as a flexible resource protection tool. As of 2006, the Conservancy has completed approximately 45 agricultural conservation easements protecting more than 15,000 acres and has nine current projects that could add another 3,000 acres. As of 2010, the Ag Land Trust has completed more than 65 agricultural easements protecting more than 22,000 acres.

This Agriculture Element establishes policies directed at enhancing and supporting long-term productivity and commercial viability of the County's agricultural industry. The purpose of this Element is to:

- a. Identify ways in which agricultural uses are addressed differently than other land use policies in the General Plan,
- b. Establish exemptions for routine agricultural activities,
- c. Include measures designed to protect agriculture operations (e.g. buffers, compatible uses) and to help strengthen the County's "Right-to-Farm" Ordinance.

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GOALS AND POLICIES AGRICULTURE

GENERAL AGRICULTURE

GOAL AG-1

PROMOTE THE LONG-TERM PROTECTION, CONSERVATION, AND ENHANCEMENT OF PRODUCTIVE AND POTENTIALLY PRODUCTIVE AGRICULTURAL LAND.

Policies

AG-1.1 Land uses that would interfere with routine and ongoing agricultural operations on viable farmlands designated as Prime, of Statewide Importance, Unique, or of Local Importance shall be prohibited.

AG-1.2 The County shall require that well-defined buffer areas be provided as partial mitigation for new non-agricultural development proposals that are located adjacent to agricultural land uses on farm lands designated as Prime, of Statewide Importance, Unique, or Local Importance.

a. Criteria. The following criteria shall be used to establish agricultural buffers to protect current and reasonably foreseeable future agricultural operations:

1. The type of non-agricultural use proposed, site conditions and anticipated agricultural practices.
2. Weather patterns, crop type, machinery and pesticide use, existence of topographical features, trees and shrubs, and possible development of landscape berms to separate the non-agricultural use from the existing agricultural use.

b. Buffers. Buffers and/or easements shall be:

1. Designed to comply with applicable state and local laws regulating school buffers, pesticide buffers, and other controls.
2. Provided on the land designated for the proposed new use and not on the adjacent agricultural land unless by mutual agreement between the two landowners. Buffer maintenance will be the responsibility of the underlying fee title owner and shall be enforceable by the County of Monterey.
3. Designed to be used for the purposes and manner described in this policy and for no other purposes unless agreed to by abutting landowners. Drainage, shading, vegetation, and erosion control shall be made beneficial to the adjacent agricultural use.

In circumstances in which a buffer is not meant to be permanent, it will be terminated once the underlying agricultural purpose for the buffer no longer

exists. The Agricultural Advisory Committee shall review and make recommendations on establishment of, and changes to, buffer zones.

- AG-1.3 Subdivision of Important Farmland, as mapped by the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, and designated by the County as “Farmland,” shall be allowed only for exclusive agricultural purposes. Exceptions to this policy are:
- a. A Community Plan, or Infrastructure and Financing Study for a Rural Center, that implements an alternative farmland preservation strategy.
 - b. Division of land for the creation of farmworker or employee/family housing as allowed in *Policies AG-1.6 and AG-1.7*.
- AG-1.4 Viable agricultural land uses, including ancillary and support uses and facilities on farmland designated as Prime, of Statewide Importance, Unique, or of Local Importance shall be conserved, enhanced and expanded through agricultural land use designations and encouragement of large lot agricultural zoning, except as provided in a Community Plan. Agriculture shall be established as the top land use priority for guiding further economic development on agricultural lands.
- AG-1.5 An ordinance establishing policies that provide tax and economic incentives to enhance the competitive capabilities of farms and ranches, thereby promoting long-term conservation, enhancement, and expansion of viable agricultural lands, shall be enacted.
- AG-1.6 In areas designated for agricultural land use, farmworker housing may be considered, subject to appropriate public health and environmental review in accordance with state law. Farmworker housing projects shall be located to minimize the conversion of viable agricultural lands and shall be consistent with the nature of the surrounding land uses.
- AG-1.7 In the Agricultural land use designations, housing facilities for family members and/or employees and their families employed on-site or off-site are allowed. Such housing shall be sited to minimize the conversion of viable agricultural lands, and is subject to approval of a discretionary permit. 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 shall be encouraged.
- AG-1.8 Development projects on lands designated for agricultural use that require a discretionary permit shall be referred to the County’s Agricultural Advisory Committee for their review and recommendation to the decision-making body.
- AG-1.9 Agricultural operations in accord with all applicable laws and regulations and consistent with properly accepted customs and practices shall be given increased protection from nuisance claims through strengthening the County’s “Right-to-Farm” ordinance. Said ordinance shall establish the strongest, most effective

possible noticing requirements to make property owners located near agricultural operations aware of potential conditions that are accepted practices within Monterey County.

- AG-1.10 The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) Important Farmland Categories developed by the California Department of Conservation shall be used as a primary means to identify important agricultural lands in the County.
- AG-1.11 Permits for agriculture activities shall be integrated with applicable permit coordination (streamlining) programs.
- AG-1.12 The County shall prepare, adopt, and implement a program that requires projects involving a change of land use designation resulting in the loss of Important Farmland (as mapped by the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program) to mitigate the loss of that acreage. For such land to be annexed to incorporated areas, the County shall work in consultation with the cities to mitigate the loss of Important Farmland resulting from annexation. The program may include ratios, payment of fees, or some other mechanisms. Mitigation mechanisms established through this program shall be based upon a graduated value of the Important Farmland, with mitigation for loss of prime land having the highest agricultural value. The County shall support private, non-profit land trusts and conservation organizations to promote the policies of this General Plan, facilitate the implementation of the program, and to receive, by voluntary donation or purchase, development rights on any lands to be preserved as part of this program's implementation strategy.

The acreage within a project or annexation that is to be utilized for inclusionary housing shall not be subject to this mitigation policy. A Community Plan or Rural Center Plan that includes a mitigation program shall not be subject to this policy. Annexations or sphere of influence amendments covered by the Greater Salinas Area Memorandum of Understanding (GSA MOU) shall be consistent with and governed by the terms of the GSA MOU and with the City's General Plan.

Until such time as the program has been established, the County shall consult and cooperate with the cities so that projects shall mitigate the loss of Important Farmland on an individual basis as much as is feasible as determined by the Board of Supervisors.

AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT USES

GOAL AG-2

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO RETAIN, DEVELOP, AND EXPAND THOSE AGRICULTURE-RELATED ENTERPRISES AND AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT USES

ESSENTIAL TO THE CONTINUING VIABILITY OF THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY.

Policies

- AG-2.1 Agricultural support facilities such as coolers, cold storage, warehouses, parking lots, greenhouses, temporary and permanent worker housing and offices, processing equipment and facilities, agricultural research facilities, loading docks, workshops established to serve on-site and/or off-site farming and ranching activities shall be considered compatible and appropriate uses in the Farmlands, Permanent Grazing, and Rural Grazing land use designations. The County shall establish an ordinance that determines which uses require a discretionary permit.
- AG-2.2 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 shall be encouraged and supported.
- AG-2.3 Agricultural processing facilities for products grown in and out of the County are compatible and appropriate land uses in the Farmlands, Permanent Grazing, and Rural Grazing land use designations.
- AG-2.4 Agriculture-related enterprises and agricultural support uses shall be sited and designed to minimize the loss of productive agricultural lands and to minimize impacts on surrounding land uses.
- AG-2.5 Collaboration with research institutions and other agencies to research domestic and global markets for Monterey County products shall be supported and encouraged.
- AG-2.6 Development of agricultural research facilities and activities shall be encouraged and supported. Continuing innovation in areas such as plant breeding, cultural practices, post-harvest handling, organic farming, and biotechnology is vital to maintain a competitive agricultural industry.
- AG-2.7 Collaboration with agricultural businesses and organizations to promote a healthy and competitive agricultural industry whose products are recognized as being produced in Monterey County shall be supported and encouraged.
- AG-2.8 Recreational uses that do not adversely impact the long-term productivity of on-site agricultural uses or on adjacent lands are considered compatible uses in the Farmlands, Permanent Grazing, and Rural Grazing land use designations.
- AG-2.9 On-site farm equipment storage facilities shall be allowed within agricultural land use designations and shall be sited to minimize the conversion of viable agricultural lands. Such facilities are defined as buildings and land used to

provide storage of a range of farm equipment, such as trucks, trailers, buses, harvesters, tractors, plows, fertilizer and spray rigs, and water tenders. Farm equipment storage facilities that serve off-site agricultural operations, not a part of the same farming or ranching operation, shall be considered with a discretionary permit.

ROUTINE AND ONGOING

GOAL AG-3

ASSURE THAT THE COUNTY'S LAND USE POLICIES DO NOT INAPPROPRIATELY LIMIT OR CONSTRAIN "ROUTINE AND ONGOING AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES."

Policies

- AG-3.1 "Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities" shall be allowed pursuant to the policies in this plan. Activities that may have significant impacts are subject to a greater level of review.
- AG-3.2 In order to encourage the continuation and economic viability of the agricultural industry, the County shall work with the agricultural industry and state and federal agencies to streamline permit procedures for "Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities" as enumerated in policy.
- AG-3.3 In lands with a Farmlands, Permanent Grazing, or Rural Grazing land use designation, farming and ranching activities that are "Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities" should be exempted from the General Plan policies listed below to the extent specified in those policies, except for activities that create significant soil erosion impacts or violate adopted water quality standards. The County shall, after consultation with the Agricultural Commissioner and with appropriate review by the Agricultural Advisory Committee, establish by ordinance a list of "Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities" that can, in harmony with General Plan goals and in accordance with state and federal law, be exempted from the listed General Plan policies as described. Activities to be considered for inclusion in the list of "Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities" may include, but are not limited to:
- a. pasture and rangeland management;
 - b. conversion of agricultural land to other agricultural uses;
 - c. preparation of product for market, and delivery of product to market;
 - d. planting, harvesting, cultivation, tillage, selection, rotation, irrigation, fallowing, and all soil preparation activities;
 - e. raising of livestock, poultry, fur bearing animals, dairying, or fish;
 - f. maintenance of sediment basins, stock ponds, irrigation and tail water return systems, stream bank and grade stabilization, water retention and pumping facilities, erosion control and surface drainage activities;

- g. maintenance of farm access roads, trails, and parking facilities;
- h. fencing, corrals, animal handling facilities;
- i. greenhouses, sheds, storage and outbuildings;
- j. emergency activity that protects the health and safety of the general public.

“Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities” are exempt from the following General Plan policies to the extent specified by those policies: *C-5.3 (Scenic Highway Corridors)*, *C-5.4 (Scenic Highway Corridors)*, *OS-1.9 (views)*, *OS-1.12 (scenic routes)*, *OS-5.5 (native vegetation)*, *OS-6.3 (archaeological)*, *OS-7.3 (paleontological)*, *OS-8.3 (burial sites)*, *OS-10.8 (air quality)*, *S-2.3 (floodplain)*. Further modifications may be made in Area Plans as part of this process.

The ordinance to be enacted by the County will also identify County permit requirements for specific “Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities” consistent with these exemptions, General Plan goals, and state and federal law.

WINE INDUSTRY

GOAL AG-4

SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FULLY INTEGRATED WINE INDUSTRY.

Policies

- AG-4.1 In order to promote the continuation and economic viability of the agricultural industry, development of a fully integrated wine industry incorporating cultivation, processing, marketing, sales, and tourism to fully utilize the wine grape production of the County shall be supported.
- AG-4.2 To achieve a balance between the wine grape production and wine processing capacity within the County, and to enhance the industry’s marketing of Monterey County wines, a winery corridor shall be designated in the Salinas Valley that consists of the following segments (*See Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan Figure AWCP3*):
 - a. Central/Arroyo Seco/River Road;
 - b. Metz Road; and
 - c. Jolon Road.
- AG-4.3 The County shall develop and maintain an Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan (AWCP) that establishes guidelines and standards to encourage development of the wine industry within the designated corridor.
- AG-4.4 Policies of *Goal AG-4* do not limit the development of wineries within or outside of the designated winery corridor. Wineries outside of the designated winery corridors and additional wineries within the corridors beyond those specifically

listed are allowed, subject to conformance with all regulations of the underlying zoning district.

- AG-4.5 Wineries shall provide for the proper storage and disposal of pomace resulting from winery operations.
- To minimize odors resulting from the storage of pomace, all residue shall be removed from the site or spread in the vineyards as a soil amendment by the winery.
 - To prevent complaints resulting from burning of pomace, burning of pomace as a disposal method shall be prohibited.
 - All wineries shall incorporate best management practices and technologies to prevent fugitive emissions and odors from escaping the winery during production.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

GOAL AG-5

ENSURE COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN THE COUNTY'S AGRICULTURAL USES AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES.

Policies

- AG-5.1 Programs that reduce soil erosion and increase soil productivity shall be supported.
- AG-5.2 Policies and programs to protect and enhance surface water and groundwater resources shall be promoted, but shall not be inconsistent with State and federal regulations.

CIRCULATION

GOAL AG-6

DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A CIRCULATION SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS THE COUNTY'S AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY.

Policies

- AG-6.1 Improvement of regional transportation systems to support the needs of the agricultural industry shall be encouraged and supported.