Agricultural Resources

Introduction

The purpose of the Agricultural Resources Element is to protect and enhance this vital component of the County's economy and quality of life. This element contains goals, policies, and implementation measures designed to address agricultural resources in the County. The following topics are covered in this section:

- Agricultural Protection (Section 12.1),
- Agricultural Enhancement (Section 12.2),
- Agricultural Tourism (Section 12.3),
- Agricultural Research and Education (Section 12.4), and
- Timber Resources (Section 12.5).

See also the goals and policies in the Water Resources Element (Section 11)

Key Terms

The following terms are used throughout this element to describe agriculture issues:

Agricultural Lands. Collective term for farmlands designated as Prime, Unique, Farmlands of Statewide Importance, Farmlands of Local Importance, or Grazing Land under the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program.

- **Prime Farmland**. Farmland with the best combination of physical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields.

  According to California Government Code Section 51201 is defined as:

  - All land which qualifies for rating as Class I or Class II in the Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) land use capability classifications.
  - Land which qualifies for rating 80 through 100 in the Storie Index Rating.
  - Land which supports livestock used for the production of food and fiber and which has an annual carrying capacity equivalent to at least one animal unit per acre as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture.
  - Land planted with fruit- or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes, or crops which have a non-bearing period of less than five years and which will normally return during the commercial bearing period on an annual basis from the projection of unprocessed agricultural plan production not less than two hundred dollars ($200) per acre.
  - Land which has returned from the projection of unprocessed agricultural plant production an annual gross value of not less than two hundred dollars ($200) per acre for three of the previous five years.
- **Unique Farmland**. Farmland of lesser 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 climatic zones in California.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance**. Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture.
- **Farmland of Local Importance**. Land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee. For the Lake County

General Plan, these areas are referred to as Primary Agricultural Areas (refer to Policy AR-1.1 for a further description).

- **Grazing Land / Range Land**. Land on which the existing vegetation is suited for the grazing of livestock.

Agricultural Preserve. Areas protected for agricultural use by either contract (such as a Williamson Act contract), easement (such as a conservation easement), or other mechanism design to protect the agricultural use of land for 10 or more years.

Agriculturally-Designated Lands. Land designated on the Lake County General Plan Land Use Diagram as "Agriculture."

Agriculturally-Related Uses. Uses that support the production of agricultural commodities (e.g., agricultural supplies, commercial processing facilities, animal husbandry, or horticulture services).

Buffer. A physical separation between land uses designed to protect existing land uses or natural conditions from new development. The amount of buffer is dependent on the types of land uses and activities involved. Buffers can include natural features (e.g., watercourses, ridgelines), physical features (e.g., walls, landscape screens), and distance (i.e., amount of physical separation).

Cluster Development. Development in which a number of dwelling units are placed in closer proximity than usual, or are attached, with the purpose of retaining an open-space area.

Community Growth Boundary. An officially adopted and mapped line dividing land to be developed from land to be protected for natural or rural uses. Community Growth Boundaries (also referred to as urban limit lines and urban growth boundaries) are regulatory tools, often designated for long periods of time (20 or more years) to provide greater certainty for both development and conservation goals. For a definition and maps or these areas, see Section 3.5, Urban / Rural Boundary and specifically, Policy LU-2.6, Community Growth Boundaries.

Conservation Easement. A voluntary agreement between a landowner and public agency or non-profit conservation organization. The agreement legally restricts uses of the land, such as building houses on it that would reduce or destroy its potential for agricultural production. The principal objective of an agricultural conservation easement is to safeguard the productivity of farmland and the integrity of the agricultural operation. Easements may be dedicated by the landowner or purchased by the public agency or conservation organization.

Farmworker Housing. California's General Plan Guidelines (2003) define farmworker housing as a one of several special housing needs that must be address when applicable to an area.

Farmworker housing is discussed in Section 4, Housing Element.

Non-Agricultural Uses. Land uses that are not directly connected with or are associated with agricultural production.

Ranchette. Parcel typically 1.5 to 10 acres in size developed primarily for residential use with small-scale agricultural activities as a secondary use.

Soil Quality. The capacity of a specific kind of soil to function, within natural or managed ecosystem boundaries, to sustain plant and animal productivity, maintain or enhance water and air quality, and support human health and habitation.

Soil Capability Classifications. The following are the generally accepted definitions for Soil Compatibility Classes I – VIII.

- **Capability Class - I** Soils in Class I have few limitations that restrict their use.
- **Capability Class - II** Soils in Class II have some limitations that reduce the choice of plants or require moderate conservation practices.
- **Capability Class - III** Soils in Class III have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or require special conservation practices, or both.
- **Capability Class - IV** Soils in Class IV have very severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants, require very careful management, or both.
- **Capability Class – V** Soils in Class V have little or no erosion hazard but have other limitations impractical to remove that limit their use.
- **Capability Class - VI** Soils in Class VI have severe limitations that make them generally unsuited to cultivation and limit their use largely to pasture, etc.
- **Capability Class - VII** Soils in Class VII have very severe limitations that make them unsuited to cultivation and that restrict their use to grazing, etc.
- **Capability Class - VIII** Soils (and landforms) in Class VIII have limitations that preclude their use for commercial plant production and restrict their use.

Value-Added Agricultural Uses. Uses or facilities that increase the value of agricultural products over the cost of the raw agricultural inputs, such as canning, drying, freezing, or packaging agricultural produce for ultimate sale to consumers.

Williamson Act (Land Conservation Act). A contract between a landowner and a city or county to restrict land within an Agricultural Preserve or Farmland Security Zone to agricultural or open space uses in return for lower than normal property tax assessments. Contracts may only be executed on lands designated as agriculture preserve by the Board of Supervisors. The minimum term for a regular Williamson Act contract is 10 years and 20 years for a "Super" contract. Since the term automatically renews on each anniversary date of the contract, the actual term can be indefinite.

Contracts may be terminated at the option of the landowner or local government by initiating the process of term non-renewal. Under this process, the contract stops automatic renewal, and the remaining contract term at that point (9 years in the case of an original term of 10 years) is completed, with the contract null and void at the end of the term. Property tax rates increase during the non-renewal period, until they reach normal (i.e., non-restricted) levels upon termination of the contract.

Under a set of specifically defined circumstances, a contract may be cancelled without completing the process of term non-renewal. Contract cancellation, however, involves a comprehensive review and approval process, and the payment of fees by the landowner equal to 12.5 percent of the full market value of the subject property.

Contracts may be terminated at the option of the landowner or local government by initiating the process of term non-renewal. Under this process, the remaining contract term (9 years in the case of an original term of 10 years) is allowed to lapse, with the contract null and void at the end of the term. Property tax rates increase during the non-renewal period, until they reach normal (i.e., non-restricted) levels upon termination of the contract.

Expired parcels are those parcels that have previously been subject to Williamson Act contract, and have since been removed from the contract through non-renewal, cancellation, or annexation.

12.1 Agricultural Protection

Goal AR-1	To preserve and maintain a viable and diverse agricultural industry within Lake County.

Policy AR-1.1 ***Primary Agricultural Areas***

The County shall utilize the areas designated as Agriculture on the General Plan Land Use Diagram as representing the Primary Agricultural Areas in the County (Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance and Farmland of Local Importance). These areas are considered to be viable for a variety of agricultural uses based on factors such as soil characteristics, topography, and location. The County shall utilize this information when making land use or resource decisions. Areas designated

Agriculture inside of Community Growth Boundaries are considered locations for potential urban development, and are not to be defined as Primary Agricultural Areas.

Policy AR-1.2 ***Agricultural Activities***

Unless otherwise specified in this General Plan or other regulation, the County shall support the continuation of typical agricultural activities within the Primary Agricultural Areas without the need for separate County approvals. This does not eliminate the need to comply with the permit requirements of other agencies or compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Policy AR-1.3 ***Development Intensity***

The County shall limit non-agricultural development in the unincorporated portions of the County designated as Primary Agricultural Areas, as follows:

- For new land divisions or lot line adjustments, the County shall maintain a minimum parcel size large enough to sustain agricultural use outside of the Community Growth Boundaries.
- The County's rules for parcel sizes shall be based on slope, local agricultural conditions, and the need to ensure the viability of agricultural operations.

Residential uses in support of agricultural operations are allowed if appropriate buffers from agricultural uses are provided (see Policy AR-1.6, Buffers).

Policy AR-1.4 ***Non-Agricultural Development***

With the exception of allowable resort, support commercial uses, agricultural industry, and farmworker housing, non-agricultural development should be directed to appropriate areas within the Community Growth Boundaries and the cities of Clearlake and Lakeport (including areas within adopted spheres of influence).

Policy AR-1.5 ***Right-to-Farm Disclosure***

As a condition of approval of a discretionary development permit, relating to property located inside a Primary Agricultural Area or within 1,000 feet of agricultural land or agricultural operations, the County will ensure all property owners and/or applicants are informed of the potential agricultural operations in the area and agricultural conditions in the area and will be required to sign and record a deed notification containing the information in the County's Zoning Ordinance (Section 21-4.18, Notice of Farming Practices) with the deed for the property(ies) involved.

Policy AR-1.6 Buffers

To protect current agricultural activities, the County shall require an appropriate buffer between existing agricultural uses and proposed residential dwellings or other inhabited structures in the Primary Agricultural Areas. Buffer design and maintenance will be required based on site conditions, but will incorporate, at a minimum, the following:

- Buffers shall be located on the parcel(s) for which a permit or approval is sought.
- Buffers shall be sized and physically designed to avoid conflicts between agriculture and non-agricultural uses. The size of the buffer shall be determined on a site-by-site basis taking into account the type of existing agricultural uses, the nature of the proposed development, the natural features of the site, and any other factors that affect the specific situation. A minimum buffer of 100 feet from a property used for commercial agricultural purposes shall be required.
- Buffer areas can be incorporated into the adjacent agricultural areas if the new development can purchase a conservation easement from the agricultural entity to restrict operations that may drive a large buffer area (e.g., eliminating spraying on the adjacent area).
- In larger buffer areas (such as along the outer edge of a community), appropriate types of land uses for buffers include compatible agriculture, open space and recreational uses such as parks and golf courses, industrial uses, and cemeteries.
- The County shall condition projects to ensure the on-going maintenance of buffers.
- Buffer restrictions may be removed if agricultural uses on all adjacent parcels have permanently ceased.
- Development of a residential unit owned by the agricultural operator on that (or adjacent) property is exempt from the provisions of this policy.
- The County will encourage property owners and developers to place new homes on a site to maximize the distance of that unit from adjacent agricultural uses.
- The County will ensure that adequate buffers are maintained when a lot line adjustment is requested.
- For pre-existing, legally created parcels where the minimum or appropriate buffer can not be provided, the buffer shall be maximized on the site.

See also Policy LU- 3.3, Clustering of Rural Development

Policy AR-1.7 ***Avoid Extension of Infrastructure into Agricultural Areas***

Extension of services, such as sewer and water lines and roadways, into areas preserved for agriculture use should be avoided. Where necessary, they should be located in public rights-of-way in order to prevent interference with agricultural operations and to provide ease of access for operation and maintenance. Service capacity and length of lines shall be designed to prevent the conversion of agricultural lands into urban/suburban uses.

Policy AR-1.8 ***Discourage Parcelization of Agricultural Lands***

The County should discourage the parcelization of land within the designated Primary Agricultural Areas that would divide land into units too small to economically support a viable agricultural operation and which contributes to the transition of agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses.

Policy AR-1.9 ***Encourage Consolidation of Agricultural Parcels***

When feasible, the recombining of substandard sized agricultural parcels to make economic farm units should be encouraged.

Policy AR-1.10 ***Transitional Densities in Communities***

Community / Area Plans shall incorporate transitional densities on the outer edges of the Community Development Areas that are adjacent to Primary Agricultural Areas. The outer edge areas will typically incorporate open space or other non-residential uses in these transitional areas. If residential designations are included in these buffer areas, parcel sizes will be large enough to allow the residential unit to be sited outside the necessary buffer area. Clustering of residential units to preserve a buffer area is also appropriate. (Also see Policy AR-1.6, Buffers)

Policy AR-1.11 ***Williamson Act and Farmland Security Act***

The County shall encourage the use of the Williamson Act and Farmland Security Act to preserve productive agricultural land. The County will not support such contracts within the boundaries of a Community Growth Boundary.

Policy AR-1.12 ***Conservation Easements***

The County shall encourage the use of agricultural and conservation easements to preserve agricultural land.

See also the policies under Goal LU-2, Urban / Rural Boundary

Policy AR-1.13 ***Expansion of Community Boundaries***

The County shall avoid areas designated as Primary Agricultural Areas (see Policy AR-1.1) when considering expansion of an urban growth boundary. Boundaries will only be expanded into these areas when other options are found to not be feasible or are not in the best interest of the community or County.

Policy AR-1.14 ***City and Community Boundaries***
The County will work with the cities of Clearlake and Lakeport to avoid expansion of their spheres of influence into areas designated by the County as Primary Agricultural Areas (see Policy AR-1.1).

12.2 Agricultural Enhancement

Goal AR-2	To promote a diverse, healthy, and competitive agricultural industry within the County.

Policy AR-2.1 ***Economic Development of Agricultural Areas***
The County should continue to support programs of agricultural technical assistance and should cooperate with public and private groups to promote the economic development of agricultural areas.

Policy AR-2.2 ***Agricultural Promotion***
The County will support marketing programs designed to promote Lake County agricultural products and agri-tourism venues to markets outside of Lake County.

Policy AR-2.3 ***Agricultural Economic Zones***
The County shall encourage the development of agricultural economic zones, promoting the development of agriculturally-related uses such as wineries, olive press facilities, and other agricultural processing facilities, to increase the overall agricultural viability of the County.

Policy AR-2.4 ***Agriculturally-Related Support Industries and Services***
The County shall allow, by discretionary permit in areas designated Primary Agricultural Areas, agriculturally-related uses, including value-added processing facilities, and certain non-agricultural uses. Approval of these and similar uses in areas designated Agriculture shall be subject to the following criteria:

a. The use shall provide a needed service to the surrounding agricultural area which cannot be provided more efficiently within urban areas or which requires location in a non-urban area because of unusual site requirements or operational characteristics;

b. The operational or physical characteristics of the use shall not have a detrimental impact on water resources or the use or management of surrounding properties within at least one-quarter (1/4) mile radius;

c. The activity must be found to support agricultural operations, production, or processing within the County; and

d. For proposed value-added agricultural processing facilities, the evaluation under criteria "a" above, shall consider the service requirements of the use and the capability and capacity of cities and unincorporated communities to provide the required services.

Policy AR-2.5 ***Energy Production***

The County shall encourage and support the development of alternative energies production (e.g., ethanol) as new agricultural-related industries and for the utilization of agricultural waste.

Policy AR-2.6 ***Encouraging Agricultural Support Industries and Services***

The County will work to encourage the development of agricultural support industries and services in the County.

Policy AR-2.7 ***Agriculturally Intensive Land Uses***

Agriculturally intensive uses shall be reviewed through a conditional use permit (CUP) process to ensure the site is appropriate for the use proposed and to attach conditions needed to make the use compatible with surrounding land uses.

Policy AR-2.8 ***Agriculturally-Related Commercial Uses***

Within the Primary Agricultural Areas, the County will permit agriculturally-related commercial uses that meet the following criteria:

- Uses shall be limited to those that promote agricultural production in the County
- All agricultural processing and marketing facilities shall be encouraged to utilize products grown or derived from Lake County.
- Direct-market stands shall be allowed in agricultural areas
- The use is compatible with existing agricultural uses in the area and does not adversely impact agricultural operations
- The use does not require the extension of urban services (sewer and/or water service)
- No facilities supporting or offering off-road vehicles.

Policy AR-2.9 ***Geothermal Resources***

The County shall encourage agricultural applications which could directly use geothermal resources as a heat source instead of fossil fuels if properly planned and compatible with surrounding land uses.

Policy AR-2.10 ***Soil Productivity***

The County shall encourage landowners to participate in programs that reduce soil erosion and increase soil productivity. To this end, the County shall promote coordination between the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Resource Conservation Districts, UC Cooperative Extension, and other similar agencies and organizations.

12.3 Agricultural Tourism

Goal AR-3	To provide opportunities for agri-tourism that is beneficial to the County and its agricultural industry and is compatible with the long-term viability of agriculture.

Policy AR-3.1 ***Visitor-Related Agricultural Uses***

The County should establish criteria for, and amend the zoning ordinance to allow development of agricultural tourism facilities, as long as the facility is secondary and incidental to the commercial agricultural use on that site and the tourism activity does not negatively impact agricultural operations on adjacent lands, based upon parcel size, proposed use and the parcels ability to provide adequate buffer zones.

1. **Small-Scale Facilities**. Facilities may be permissible if they meet the following conditions (in addition to a standard site suitability assessment as part of a normal minor use permit):

- The facility is approved subject to maintaining an agriculturally oriented theme
- The use is compatible with existing agricultural uses in the area and does not adversely impact neighboring agricultural operations
- The use does not require the extension of urban services (sewer and/or water service)
- No motorized off-road vehicles for recreational purposes (no use restrictions when used to support agricultural operations)

2. **Large-Scale Facilities**. Facilities may be permissible if they meet the following conditions (in addition to a standard site suitability assessment as part of a normal major use permit):

- The facility is approved subject to maintaining an agriculturally oriented theme
- The use is compatible with existing agricultural uses in the area and does not adversely impact neighboring agricultural operations
- The site is accessible from a County or State maintained roadway or highway
- No motorized off-road vehicles for recreational purposes (no use restrictions when used to support agricultural operations)

12.4 Agricultural Research and Education

Goal AR-4	To enhance the future viability of Lake County's agricultural resource base through the investment in research and education.

Policy AR-4.1 ***Agricultural Education Programs***
The County shall support and participate in on-going public education programs conducted by organizations such as the County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, UC Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau, and industry organizations to help the public better understand the importance of the agricultural industry to Lake County and its residents.

Policy AR-4.2 ***Research and Enhancement***
The County shall encourage agricultural agencies and marketing cooperatives to research global and domestic markets for high-value crops capable of being produced in Lake County.

Policy AR-4.3 ***Biofuels***
The County shall encourage the location of industrial and research oriented businesses specializing in biofuels that can enhance agricultural productivity, enhance food processing activities in the county, provide for new agriculturally-related products and markets, or otherwise enhance the agricultural sector in the county.

Policy AR-4.4 ***University of California Agricultural Extension***
The County will work with the County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, UC Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau, and industry organizations in the County to promote and expand agricultural opportunities in Lake County.

Policy AR-4.5 ***Vocational Training - General***
The County shall encourage regional workforce training programs.

Policy AR-4.6 ***Vocational Training – Public Schools***
The County will encourage and support vocational agricultural training in public schools, including zoning provisions to support 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) programs.

12.5 Timber Resources

Goal AR-5	To maintain a viable and renewable timber production within the County.

Policy AR-5.1 ***Protecting Prime Timber Resources – Private Lands***
The County shall classify and preserve private lands which are prime timber lands and reserve them for that use, while at the same time, encouraging compatible recreation and open space uses.

Policy AR- 5.2 Coordinate with Federal and State Agencies

The County shall coordinate closely with federal and state agencies exercising responsibilities for timber management in the County to ensure their policies and regulations are consistent with the County's General Plan and promote management that balances timber production with the protection of recreational resources and viewsheds.

See also the policies under Goal OSC-1, Biological Resources

12.6 Implementation Measures

Table 12-1, Agricultural Resources Implementation Measures, identifies the implementation measures the County should take to realize the goals and policies of this element. The table lists each specific implementation measure, a reference to which General Plan policy it supports, who is responsible for the action, and the timeframe for implementation.

Table 12-1. Agricultural Resources Implementation Measures

	Implementation Measure	Policy	Who is Responsible	Timeframe				
				2008-2012	2013-2017	2018-2022	2023-2028	On-going
1.0	The County shall apply an agricultural designation to properties within the adopted "Primary Agricultural Areas."	AR-1.1	Community Development Department	■				
2.0	The County shall compile and provide information to the local real estate industry to help make the public aware of the right-to-farm provisions in the County.	AR-1.5	Community Development Department	■				■
3.0	The County will initiate a program to implement the merger ordinance on an individual subdivision basis, concentrating on subdivisions that meet the following criteria: ▪ The properties are under one ownership; ▪ The property consists of productive agricultural land; ▪ The lot sizes of the antiquated subdivision are insufficient to support a residential septic system; and ▪ Implementation of the subdivision would be clearly inconsistent with agriculture-related uses in the area.	AR-1.9	Community Development Department		■			■
4.0	The County shall adopt policies and procedures for the use of agricultural and conservation easements to preserve agricultural land.	AR-1.12	Community Development Department	■				

	Implementation Measure	Policy	Who is Responsible	Timeframe				
				2008-2012	2013-2017	2018-2022	2023-2028	On-going
5.0	Amendments to the zoning ordinance should be considered that provide opportunities for value-added agricultural uses.	AR-2.1	Community Development Department					■
6.0	The County shall work with agricultural interests and local restaurants and stores to promote the sales and use of agricultural products grown or processed in Lake County.	AR-2.2	Agricultural Commissioner Farm Bureau Chamber of Commerce					■
7.0	The County will develop a streamlined permit process for new or expanded agricultural support industries and services in the County.	AR-2.4 AR-2.5	Community Development Department		■			
8.0	The County shall evaluate changes in the Zoning Ordinance to provide a combining district for small- and large-scale lodging and resorts.	AR-3.2	Community Development Department	■				
9.0	The County will work with the U.S. Forest Service to restrict off highway vehicle use on lands they manage within the County.	AR-5.2	Community Development Department					■
10.0	The County shall evaluate changes in the Zoning Ordinance to allow farm labor camps as a minor use permit.	HE-4.1	Community Development Department	■				