

CHAPTER 7.0
AGRICULTURAL ELEMENT

Monterey County has elected to include an Agricultural 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 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 and long term contracts, in return for reduced property taxes. Currently 735,000 acres of land are under Williamson Act contract in Monterey County with 32,000 acres are 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 a Monterey County Agricultural and Historical Land Conservancy, Incorporated that was created in 1984 by Monterey County residents. This Conservancy 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.

This Agricultural 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. define routine activities that are exempt from other land use policies in the General Plan,
- c. include measures designed to protect agriculture operations (e.g. buffers, compatible uses) and to help strengthen the County's Right-to-Farm Ordinance.

GOALS AND POLICIES AGRICULTURE

GENERAL AGRICULTURE

GOAL AG-1

PROMOTE THE LONG-TERM CONSERVATION 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 ~~purpose of the following criteria shall be used to establish~~ agricultural buffers ~~is to protect the existing agricultural operations: Buffers are not meant to be permanent and will be terminated once the underlying reason for the buffer no longer exists. Buffers shall be provided from the proposed new use and not from the adjacent agricultural land unless by mutual agreement between the landowners.~~
- a. Factors to consider include the type of non-agricultural use proposed, site conditions and anticipated agricultural practices. Other factors include weather patterns, crop type, machinery and pesticide use, existence of topographical features, trees and shrubs, and possible development of landscape berm to separate the non-agricultural use from the existing agricultural use.
 - b. Drainage, shading, vegetation, and erosion control shall be considered in the establishment of an agricultural buffer area and be made beneficial to the adjacent agricultural use.
 - c. Buffers shall be designed to comply with applicable state and local laws regulating school buffers, pesticide setbacks, and other controls ~~shall be considered.~~
 - d. Agricultural buffers and/or easements shall be provided from the proposed new use and not from the adjacent agricultural land unless by mutual agreement between the two landowners.
 - e. Agricultural buffers are designed to be used for the purposes and manner described in this policy and for no other purposes unless agreed to by abutting landowners.
 - f. Buffer maintenance will be the responsibility of the underlying fee title owner.
 - g. Buffers are not meant to be permanent and will be terminated once the underlying reason for the buffer no longer exists.

- h. The Agricultural Advisory Committee shall review and recommend changes to established buffer zones.

AG-1.3 Division of Important Farmland (as mapped by the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program) ~~designated as Prime, of Statewide Importance, or Unique, or of Local Importance and designated as Farmlands, Permanent Grazing, or Rural Grazing~~ shall be allowed only for exclusive agricultural purposes and ~~or~~ when demonstrated not to be detrimental to the agricultural viability of adjoining parcels. Exceptions to this policy include:

- a. ~~, or in accordance with policies of~~ A Community Plan/Specific Plan/Rural Center Plan ~~which 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, 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.

AG-1.5 An ordinance establishing policies that provide tax and economic incentives to enhance the competitive capabilities of farms and ranches, thereby promoting ~~insuring~~ long-term conservation, enhancement, and expansion of viable agricultural lands shall be supported enacted. ~~Examples of these policies and programs include but are not limited to:~~

- a. ~~Establishment of a program to purchase and lease back agricultural lands near urban or developing areas for continued agricultural use.~~
- b. ~~Payment of fees as mitigation for the loss of farmland to other uses.~~
- c. ~~Voluntary restrictions to agricultural uses through contributions of on-site or off-site conservation easements or other appropriate techniques.~~
- d. ~~Williamson Act Contracts~~
- e. ~~Transfer of development rights.~~

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 farm 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 is provided herein. the County's "Right-to-Farm" ordinance. notice shall be required, as a condition of approval of a discretionary permit, through disclosure and notice in deeds at time of property transfer or sale, notice provisions in all title reports prepared in the County, and as a permit condition for new subdivisions and residential units proposed adjacent to agricultural lands. 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 one means to identify important agricultural lands in the County.
- AG-1.11 Permits for agriculture activities will be integrated with applicable ~~resource conservation district~~ permit coordination (streamlining) programs.
- ~~AG-1.12 Prior to the discretionary approval of any new non agricultural or non agricultural related land use to be located on designated Important Farmland, 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. by permanently protecting other Important Farmland in the County at a minimum 2:1 ratio. The program may include ratios, payment of fees, or some other mechanisms. Until such time as the program has been established, projects shall mitigate the loss of Important Farmland on an individual basis as feasible as determined by the Agricultural Commissioner. A Community Plan or Rural Center Plan that includes a mitigation program shall not be subject to this policy.~~

(Mitigation Measure AG-1)

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, loading docks, workshops established to serve on-site and/or off-site farming and ranching activities shall be allowed 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. ~~Such uses shall be sited and designed to minimize the loss of productive agricultural lands and to minimize impacts on surrounding land uses.~~
- 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-2.45 Collaboration with research institutions and other agencies to research domestic and global markets for Monterey County products shall be supported and encouraged.
- AG-2.56 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 and biotechnology is vital to maintain a competitive agricultural industry.
- AG-2.67 Collaboration with the 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-2.78 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-2.89 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 ON-GOING

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 and exempt](#) "Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities" as enumerated in policy. ~~Exemptions do not preclude compliance with other state and federal requirements.~~
- AG-3.3 ~~In lands with Agricultural land use designations, farming and ranching activities that are 'Routine and On-going Agricultural Activities' are not considered "development" or "new development" for purposes of implementing this Plan. 'Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities' may be exempt from applicable General Plan policies, although such activities may remain subject to applicable federal, state and county permit requirements to be established by ordinance. shall 'Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities' include, but are not limited to:~~
- ~~a. — cultivation, tillage and irrigation of soil;~~
 - ~~b. — conversion of agricultural land to other agricultural uses;~~
 - ~~c. — conversion of previously uncultivated rangeland to cultivated agricultural use;~~
 - ~~d. — pasture and rangeland management;~~
 - ~~e. — preparation of product for market, and delivery of product to market;~~
 - ~~f. — sale of product to consumer in facility not having permanent utilities;~~
 - ~~g. — crop, vineyard and orchard planting, harvesting, cultivation, tillage, selection, rotation, fallowing, all soil preparation activities, including, but not limited to ripping, tilling, leveling, adding amendments, fertilizing, fumigating and other pest control activities, and long term crop protection;~~

which shall include, but not be limited to, revegetation, windbreaks, and other cover crops;

- h. choice and development of irrigation systems;
- i. raising of livestock, poultry, fur bearing animals, dairying, or fish;
- j. development 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, including, but not limited to soil and water conservation measures;
- k. construction and maintenance of farm access roads, trails, and parking facilities;
- l. fencing, corrals, animal handling facilities;
- m. sheds, storage and outbuildings;
- n. hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, farm stays, and eco-tourism;
- o. any activity recognized as a compatible use under the Williamson Act;
- p. cutting or removal of Christmas trees;
- q. keeping of pets;
- r. storage structures for agricultural equipment and materials;
- s. greenhouses;
- t. windmills;
- u. non-permanent produce stands;
- v. any activity listed in this section conducted at night; and, other uses of similar character, density, and intensity as to those listed in this policy.

Related policies in other general plan elements from which routine and on-going activities are exempt include the following: Policy LU 1.6 (scenic), Policy OS 1.9 (scenic), Policy OS 3.3 (soil studies), Policy OS 3.5 (slope), Policies OS 5.1 and OS 5.4 (native vegetation), Policy OS 6.3 (archaeology), Policy OS 7.3 (paleontological), Policy OS 8.3 (burial sites), Goal OS 10 (air quality), Policy S 2.3 (100-year floodplain).

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. 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 under 1,000 square feet;
- 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: OS-1.9 (views), OS-1.12 (scenic routes), OS-3.3 (geologic/hydrologic), OS-3.5 (slope), OS-3.6 (erosive soils), OS-5.4 (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 requirement 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 (*Figure 38*, next page):
- a. Central/Arroyo Seco/River Road;
 - b. Metz Road; and
 - c. Jolon Road.
- AG-4.3 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. ~~but not limited to, addressing the following topics:~~
- a. ~~Number of artisan and full-scale wineries allowed within each corridor.~~

- ~~b. Criteria for creating a limited number of 5-acre or larger sized lots for artisan wineries within each corridor.~~
 - ~~c. Criteria for adding winery tasting facilities to existing wineries~~
 - ~~d. Number of new stand-alone winery tasting facilities within each corridor.~~
 - ~~e. Number and type of auxiliary structures and uses allowed in each corridor.~~
 - ~~f. Design Guidelines for buildings and signs (on-site and off-site)~~
 - ~~g. Infrastructure financing.~~
- ~~Development of the wine industry beyond the limits of the AWCP shall not be limited by this policy.~~

AG-4.4 These policies 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.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

GOAL AG-5

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

Policies

~~AG-5.1 Development that preserves and enhances the County's scenic qualities shall be encouraged. All Routine and Ongoing Agricultural Activities are exempt from the viewshed policies of this plan.~~

~~AG-5.2 In all agricultural land use areas, designated critical habitats are limited to those areas and species listed as rare, endangered, and threatened by federal and state regulation, including those areas subject to plans or agreements between property owners and state and/or federal agencies.~~

AG-5.31 Programs that reduce soil erosion and increase soil productivity shall be supported.

AG-5.42 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.

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Figure 38-Ag & Winery Corridors to be inserted
(11" x 17")

CIRCULATION

GOAL AG-6

DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A CIRCULATION SYSTEM THAT ~~IS-SUPPORT~~SIVE-OF 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.