

4.0 THE AGRICULTURAL ELEMENT

The Agricultural Element Background Report includes a list of relevant policies contained in the 1983 General Plan and the six community plans. The primary purpose of the Agricultural Element is to refine the existing General Plan goals, objectives and policies as they relate to agriculture and to establish new goals, objectives and policies to address changed circumstances and new priorities. As a result, certain policies contained in the current General Plan are superseded by the Agricultural Element and will be replaced by the goals, objectives and policies contained in the following paragraphs.

4.1 Agricultural Goals and Objectives

This section presents the goals and objectives of the Agricultural Element. By definition, a “goal” is a general expression of community values which sets a direction or ideal future end, condition, or state. An “objective” represents a specific end condition which is viewed as an intermediate step toward attainment of a goal. Each objective below is cross-referenced to its corresponding goal.

The numbering system for goals and objectives, and in subsequent sections policies and implementation measures, is based upon the subject area (A for Agriculture) and type of statement. The following abbreviations are used.

- Goal (AG)
- Objective (AO)
- Policy (AP)
- Implementation Measure (AI)

Goals:

AG-1: Conserve and preserve agricultural lands in Yolo County, especially areas currently farmed or having prime agricultural soils and outside existing planned communities and city limits.

AG-2: Conserve, protect and improve soil and water resources that support a variety of crops and products.

AG-3: Ensure the compatibility of land uses adjacent to agricultural operations, so that agricultural productivity is not substantially affected.

AG-4: Support and promote a healthy and competitive agricultural community and economy.

AG-5: Create sites for agricultural industry in order to meet demand for agricultural suppliers, laboratory research, field research, seed research, food processing and other related activities.

AG-6: Provide opportunities for recreation, tourism and associated support services in appropriate locations.

AG-7: Educate the public about the importance of agriculture in Yolo County.

Objectives:

AO-1: Recognition of agriculture as the most important industry in Yolo County. (AG-4)

AO-2: Maintenance of agricultural zoning containing minimum parcel sizes capable of sustaining agriculture in areas designated for agriculture while also recognizing the need to accommodate smaller more intensively farmed parcels of land. (AG-1)

AO-3: Facilitate establishment of specialty farming areas that grow higher value crops. (AG-1)

AO-4: Utilization of the Williamson Act, conservation easements, an Agricultural Lands Conversion Ordinance and similar tools to preserve agricultural lands. (AG-1)

AO-5: Maintenance of Urban Boundaries and similar mechanisms to direct urban growth and protect agricultural lands. (AG-1)

AO-6: Retention of agricultural lands within and adjacent to Rural Unincorporated Communities in agriculture in order to prevent premature conversion. (AG-1)

AO-7: Protection of groundwater recharge areas from incompatible development or use. (AG-2)

AO-8: Prudent use of groundwater and surface water resources. (AG-2)

AO-9: Enhancement and protection of an affordable and reliable agricultural water supply. (AG-2)

AO-10: Utilization of adequate buffers to protect agricultural producers. (AG-3)

AO-11: Recognition of “safe harbor” provisions for agricultural lands involved in habitat enhancement programs administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game. (AG-3)

AO-12: Limited residential use of land in agricultural areas. (AG-3)

AO-13: Establishment of a unique identity for Yolo County agricultural products. (AG-4)

- AO-14: Provision of adequate public infrastructure and services to support the agricultural community, including the ability to continue to move agricultural equipment along and across public roads. (AG-4)
- AO-15: Support marketplace initiated conversion from lower to higher value added crops and agricultural commodities. (AG-4)
- AO-16: Maintenance and creation of new markets for traditional as well as higher value added crops and agricultural commodities. (AG-4)
- AO-17: Creation of site(s) suitable for agricultural industrial park(s). (AG-5)
- AO-18: Reuse of agricultural infrastructure that is no longer needed due to changing markets and a changing economy. (AG-5)
- AO-19: Accommodation of agricultural tourism and education without adverse impacts to agriculture. (AG-6)
- AO-20: Provision for full public participation during development of County plans, policies and ordinances affecting agricultural lands. (AG-7)
- AO-21: Encouragement of ongoing public education programs by such organizations as U.C. Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Yolo County Resource Conservation District, other industry-related organizations and the public schools. (AG-7)

4.2 Agricultural Policies

This section presents the policies of the Agricultural Element. A policy is a specific statement to be used in guiding decision making, based on Agricultural Element goals and objectives.

- AP-1: Land uses in areas designated for agricultural use shall be limited to those directly related to agricultural production or support of agriculture.
- AP-2: The County shall utilize an Agricultural Conservation Easement Program to help protect and preserve agricultural lands, as defined in this Element. This program shall require payment of an in-lieu fee sufficient to purchase a farmland conservation easement, farmland deed restriction, or other farmland conservation mechanism as a condition of approval for conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural use. The in-lieu fee or other conservation mechanism shall recognize the importance of land value and shall require equivalent mitigation. This may include the use of a variable standard that requires a commitment to preserve fewer acres if the land to be preserved is threatened by development and a greater number of acres to be preserved if the land to be preserved is removed from development pressures.

- AP-3: Yolo County shall encourage acquisition of agricultural conservation easements by local, State and federal agencies and private non-profit organizations to protect agriculture.
- AP-4: Yolo County shall encourage the placement of agricultural conservation easements on land most threatened by development, i.e., those located in close proximity to cities and unincorporated communities.
- AP-5: Yolo County shall actively maintain the Williamson Act Land Conservation (Agricultural Preserve) program.
- AP-6: Yolo County shall actively promote and maintain the Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) program.
- AP-7: Upon receiving a request for an agricultural preserve contract and/or the Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) program for a property, Yolo County shall apply A-P (Agricultural Preserve) zoning. Yolo County may apply A-P zoning to other lands that the County finds are critically situated relative to existing agricultural preserves or properties in the FSZ program. When considering a request for a change in zoning to another agricultural zone, Yolo County may continue to apply A-P zoning to lands that the County finds are critically situated relative to existing agricultural preserves or properties in the FSZ program. The County may find that the continued application of A-P zoning to non-contract land is necessary to protect the land in the interest of public safety and convenience. It shall be clearly demonstrated that a change in zoning from A-P to another agricultural zone will promote agriculture.
- AP-8: New residential or suburban subdivisions shall be prohibited in areas designated for agricultural use. The division of land in an area designated for agricultural use for the sole purpose of residential subdivision development shall be prohibited.
- AP-9: The County shall utilize its zoning powers to discourage the use of “antiquated subdivisions” for nonagricultural use. The County shall review areas proximate to incorporated cities and areas previously subdivided (antiquated subdivisions) for consideration as specialty farming areas. Areas identified for this purpose shall have water and soil characteristics capable of sustaining specialty-farming operations.
- AP-10: New or expanded commercial and industrial uses shall be prohibited in areas designated for agricultural use, except as allowed by ordinance and as provided in Policy AP-1.
- AP-11: Existing legal nonagricultural uses and agricultural-related uses shall be allowed to continue, or to be replaced in case of catastrophic demise or disuse, in accordance with Zoning Ordinance provisions.
- AP-12: Agricultural lands shall be protected from urban encroachment by limiting the extension of urban service facilities and infrastructure, particularly sewers.

AP-13: Yolo County shall promote high value and intensive agricultural farming practices on good agricultural soils. Yolo County shall encourage and cooperate with appropriate agencies to conserve, study, and improve soils. Prime soils and other productive agricultural land should be preserved wherever feasible outside Urban Boundaries.

AP-14: Yolo County shall promote research, development and use of high technology agricultural practices, agricultural biotechnology, sustainable agriculture, agri-tourism, water conservation practices and non-traditional agricultural operations in order to expand and improve opportunities for those engaged in agriculture.

AP-15: The role of smaller farms growing specialty products, such as organically produced fruits and vegetables, shall be recognized and promoted in Yolo County. A unique zoning designation, or designations, may be applied to specialty farming areas that recognizes the needs of smaller farms, specialty farms, and part-time farmers.

AP-16: Zoning for small farms shall recognize the potential role such farms may play in education and agricultural tourism and should provide for the inclusion of such activities while discouraging use of small farms as homesites, subject to a conditional use permit.

AP-17: Yolo County shall consider identification of areas suitable for biotechnology-related agriculture that support the County's role as a leader in the biotechnology field.

AP-18: Yolo County shall encourage the siting of agricultural industry within the Urban Boundaries of unincorporated communities.

AP-19: Yolo County shall allow the siting of agricultural industry in the Agricultural land use designation when the following criteria are substantially met:

- The use is directly related and supportive of agriculture; and
- Lack of suitable alternative locations in Yolo County prevent the use from locating within an area not designated for agricultural use; and
- The site is not located in a contracted agricultural preserve or Farmland Security Zone; and
- The use will not diminish or prevent agricultural use on adjoining agricultural lands; and
- The use can be developed without significant reduction in cultivation and harvesting of agricultural products indigenous to the area.

AP-20: One or more agricultural industrial parks shall be encouraged and permitted in Yolo County if the following conditions are substantially satisfied:

- Market demand for such a park is shown through expressed interest from potential users, through interest from private developers, and/or analytical means;
- The park can be located where the capability to develop adequate infrastructure, including electrical power and natural gas, and adequate access to transportation exists;
- Industrial user types in the park would not interfere with other agricultural and open space activities in the vicinity;
- The park site would not be subject to unmitigated flooding hazard;
- The park site would comply with Policy AP-20;
- The Capay Valley west of Esparto is to be avoided because of its remoteness and limited amount of available land.

AP-21: Commercial, non-agricultural industry, schools and urban-density residential uses shall be directed away from agricultural lands and located in existing areas zoned for commercial, industrial, and residential uses.

AP-22: With the exception of individual residences appurtenant to active farming operations, where new urban (non-agricultural) development is approved adjacent to agricultural lands, it shall be set back a minimum of 150 feet. A setback of 300 feet shall be required for urban uses that adjoin agricultural preserves or active orchards, except where the adjacent property owner agrees in writing that the 300-foot buffer is not needed. In no case shall the buffer be reduced to less than 100 feet.

AP-23: Areas identified by the County as significantly contributing to groundwater recharge shall be protected from uses and activities that would reduce their utility for groundwater recharge or would threaten the quality of the underlying groundwater resource.

AP-24: Where small parcels of land presently exist in agricultural areas with suitable soils, the establishment of small-scale agriculture uses, specialty crops, organic farming, specialized animal facilities and agricultural research operations shall be encouraged.

AP-25: The County shall support on-going agricultural education programs aimed at informing the general public about agriculture.

AP-26: The County shall work closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.C. Cooperative Extension, the Farm Bureau and similar organizations to ensure maximum awareness of actions that may affect agriculture. These efforts shall include encouragement of the inclusion of an agricultural issues curriculum in the public schools.

AP-27: Farmers shall be encouraged to participate in programs that reduce soil erosion and increase soil productivity.

- AP-28: The County shall ensure that public roadways and drainage facilities do not adversely impact agricultural lands and shall engage the agricultural community when proposing significant modifications to such facilities.
- AP-29: The County shall work to ensure that water resources are enhanced and preserved for agriculture, both in quantity and quality, to avoid the loss of agriculture due to competition for water with other forms of development.
- AP-30: The County shall work proactively with other regional and watershed based groups on water resource issues to protect and preserve Yolo County's agricultural water supply.
- AP-31: When new sources of water supply become available to Yolo County, agriculture shall be given first priority for their use.
- AP-32: Agriculture shall be actively protected from competing land uses that may threaten agricultural water supply.
- AP-33: The County shall encourage use of the federal Safe Harbor Program and similar efforts to protect farmers involved in habitat enhancement programs whenever feasible.
- AP-34: When designated habitat areas are created adjacent to existing farming operations, buffers shall be established within the habitat area(s) that area sufficient in depth to allow on-going farming practices to continue on adjacent agricultural lands, including the application of agricultural pesticides and herbicides.
- AP-35: Yolo County shall continue to promote agriculture as the primary land use in the portion of Yolo County that lies within the Primary Zone of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, as designated by the Delta Protection Commission.
- AP-36: Farm labor housing shall be located within areas determined suitable for agricultural support services. To minimize the conversion of agricultural lands to other uses, all dwellings in agricultural areas shall be encouraged to locate on lands unsuitable for agricultural use and in "clustered" configurations or mobile or modular dwellings. Secondary dwellings may be subject to approval of a conditional use permit.
- AP-37: In recognition of the importance of the agricultural economic base of Yolo County, cities in Yolo County shall be strongly encouraged to share in the responsibility for providing adequate sites to accommodate farm labor housing.
- AP-38: Commercial surface mining operations may be permitted in agricultural areas, including contracted agricultural preserves, with approval of a mining permit, reclamation plan and financial assurances, when they are located within the Off-Channel Mining Plan area, and/or when determined to be necessary in an agricultural area, as provided by ordinance.
- AP-39: The County shall support the adoption of right-to-farm ordinances by Yolo County cities.

4.3 Agricultural Implementation Measures

This section presents the implementation measures for the Agricultural Element. Implementation measures are actions, strategies and directives which carry out Agricultural Element policies. For each implementation measure, a lead agency, timing, and funding source are identified.

AI-1: Maintain Zoning Ordinance regulations and standards that are consistent with policies for preservation of agricultural lands and soil and water resources, including the Williamson Act and the Farmland Security Zone programs.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Ongoing
Funding: General Fund

AI-2 Establish required setback or buffer areas by recorded easement or other instrument, subject to the approval of County Counsel and the Director of the Planning and Public Works Department. A method and mechanism for guaranteeing the maintenance of setback or buffer areas in a safe and orderly manner shall also be established at the time of development approval. Options include creating a homeowners association or dedication of the buffer area to a non-profit organization or public entity.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Ongoing
Funding Source: Filing fees paid by project proponents for initial establishment; endowment established by project proponents for maintenance.

AI-3: Maintain and modify necessary ordinances to implement the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, including provision for a mechanism that recognizes the variability of land value.

Lead Agencies: Planning and Public Works Department, County Counsel
Timing: Within two years and ongoing
Funding Source: General Fund

AI-4: Support the Williamson Act and advocate its continuation and improvement.

Lead Agency: Board of Supervisors, Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Ongoing
Funding: General Fund

AI-5: Support the maintenance of a Right to Farm Ordinance.

Lead Agency: Board of Supervisors, Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Ongoing
Funding: General Fund

AI-6: Communicate County General Plan policy and direction concerning extension of services by service providers. Utilize Sections 65401 and 65402 of the Government Code (General Plan consistency findings) to ensure actions consistent with the General Plan.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Every five years
Funding: General Fund

AI-7: Support efforts by the private sector to introduce high technology agricultural practices, sustainable agriculture, agri-tourism and non-traditional agricultural operations.

Lead Agency: Board of Supervisors and Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Ongoing
Funding: General Fund, Transient Occupancy Tax

AI-8: Periodically review and amend the County Zoning Ordinance to provide specific provisions for agricultural tourism.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department, Board of Supervisors
Timing: Within two years
Funding: General Fund

AI-9: Study potential sites for agricultural industrial parks in Yolo County taking into consideration access, transportation corridors and services, including access to electrical power and natural gas. Establish development guidelines and site-specific criteria for agricultural industrial parks.

Lead Agency: Economic Development Coordinator
Timing: Within two years of Plan adoption
Funding Source: General Fund or CDBG Technical Assistance Grant

AI-10: Review available means to expedite processing for a prospective agricultural industrial park. Adopt necessary ordinance to modify practices and procedures.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department, Board of Supervisors and Economic Development Coordinator
Timing: Within one year of Plan adoption
Funding: General Fund

AI-11: Once approved, participate in promoting the agricultural industrial park and help seek new users.

Lead Agency: Economic Development Coordinator
Timing: Ongoing
Funding Source: Industrial Park Developer/Owner, General Fund or CDBG
Technical Assistance Grant

AI-12: Participate in development of an agricultural awareness/public education program in concert with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Yolo County Resource Conservation District and the University of California Agricultural Extension Office.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Ongoing
Funding: General Fund, University of California

AI-13: Promote the following practices within the agricultural community:

- Full utilization of the services of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Yolo County Resource Conservation District and the University of California.
- Utilization by the agricultural community of the latest techniques to reduce soil erosion and degradation.
- Utilization of best management practices in the application and use of water resources.
- Utilization of appropriate management practices in the Primary Zone of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Lead Agency: Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner
Timing: Ongoing
Funding: University of California

AI-14: When undertaking improvement of public roadways and drainage facilities, consult with adjoining farmland owners and incorporate designs that minimize impact on agriculture.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Ongoing
Funding: County Road Fund

AI-15: Actively promote and participate in programs that retain local and regional water sources for agriculture and which actively seek to expand the local water supply, including legislative advocacy, conjunctive use, conservation, implementation of the County's Water Transfer Ordinance and development of additional multi-use reservoirs that provide additional flood protection for existing development and water for agriculture, recreation and wildlife.

Lead Agency: Board of Supervisors
Timing: Ongoing
Funding: General Fund

AI-16: Promote awareness of the need for additional technical, processing and marketing infrastructure to support a changing agricultural environment.

Lead Agency: Economic Development Coordinator
Timing: Ongoing
Funding Source: General Fund

AI-17: Promote formation of a private entity to pursue the “Yolo County branding” of agricultural products produced in Yolo County. Work with the private entity to promote their sale in a variety of markets, including farmer’s markets throughout the northern California region, and through traditional distribution channels.

Lead Agency: Economic Development Coordinator
Timing: Ongoing
Funding Source: General Fund or Contributions to a “Marketing Fund” From Growers and Processors

AI-18: As necessary, review the land use designations and zoning of lands within the Primary Zone of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to assure compliance with Policy AP-34

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Within one year of Plan adoption
Funding: General Fund

AI-19: Review, and amend as necessary, the Housing Element for consistency with Policies AP-35 and AP-36.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Within one year of Plan adoption
Funding: General Fund

AI-20: Identify potential specialty farming areas. Develop zoning that may be applied to specialty farming areas that contains sufficient restrictions to assure that such areas do not become rural residential or ranchette developments, but also recognizes the potential for part time commercial agriculture.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Within two years of Plan adoption
Funding: General Fund

AI-21: Develop zoning and/or other ordinance provisions to allow for clustering of dwelling units and other structures and agricultural land preservation in antiquated subdivisions identified as appropriate for application of such ordinance(s).

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Within two years of Plan adoption
Funding: General Fund

AI-22: Delete references to “Growth Management Study Areas” in County planning documents.

Lead Agency: Planning and Public Works Department
Timing: Within one year of Plan adoption
Funding: General Fund