

Draft Agricultural Element

Sutter County's character is reflective of its rural traditions with a landscape dominated by agricultural uses. Agriculture is a major industry in Sutter County and an integral part of the County's economic base and lifestyle.

Sutter County agriculture benefits from rich soils, water availability, climate favorable to a variety of crops, transportation infrastructure, proximity to centers of research, adjacency to other agricultural counties, and a history of generational family farming. At the same time, agriculture in the County faces growing pressures from urbanization, higher production costs, lower commodity prices, and increasing regulations. Careful land use decision-making and economic development strategies are essential to minimize the conversion of productive agricultural land, maximize new commodity and processing opportunities, and reinforce the agricultural economy.

Sutter County values and is committed to the preservation of its long-standing agricultural heritage and quality farmlands. It is supportive of uses that promote the economic, cultural, environmental, and scenic values of agriculture as well as maximize compatibility between development and agricultural operations. In addition, Sutter County is dedicated to maintaining a viable agricultural industry by sustaining existing agricultural operations, diversifying the agricultural economy, and promoting agricultural businesses.

This element of the General Plan acknowledges the importance of protecting and maintaining commercially viable agriculture in Sutter County. It provides direction regarding: the preservation of agricultural lands; minimizing conflicts between agricultural operations and other uses; preservation of natural resources for agriculture; expansion and diversification of agricultural industries; and promotion of agriculturally related visitor services and attractions.

Preserve Agricultural Lands

Goal AG 1

Preserve and protect high quality agricultural lands for long-term agricultural production. (Existing/Modified 6.A)

Policies:

AG 1.1

Agricultural Land Preservation: Preserve and maintain agriculturally designated lands for agricultural use and direct urban/suburban and other nonagricultural related development to the cities, unincorporated rural communities, and other clearly defined and comprehensively planned development areas. (Existing/Modified 6.A-1)

AG 1.2

Minimum Parcel Sizes: Establish minimum parcel sizes of 20, 40 and 80 acres on agriculturally designated lands to promote their long-term use for agriculture. Minimum agricultural parcel sizes shall be applied as follows:

- a. Apply the 20-acre minimum to those areas where a majority of existing parcels are less than 20 acres in size and the remaining parcels generally do not exceed 40 acres in size.
- b. Apply the 40-acre minimum to those areas where a majority of existing parcels are less than 40 acres in size and the remaining parcels generally do not exceed 80 acres in size.
- c. Apply the 80-acre minimum to all other agriculturally designated lands in the County.

Each agricultural land use category shall permit the full range of agricultural uses. (Existing/Modified 6.A-6)

AG 1.3

Land Use Boundaries: Use parcel boundaries and sizes, roadways, natural barriers, soil types, and existing or historic agricultural uses and crop types to define logical boundaries between 20, 40 acre and 80 acre minimum agricultural land uses. (Existing/Modified 6.A-6 & 6.A-8)

AG 1.4

Multiple Land Use Designations: Determine the minimum parcel size where multiple agricultural land use designations are shown on a single parcel of land based on such factors as soil characteristics contained in the USDA Soil Survey for Sutter County, existing and historic agricultural uses and crop types on the parcel, nearby parcel sizes, and the area of the parcel included within each land use designation. (Existing/Modified 6.A-8)

- AG 1.5 Agricultural Land Conversion:** Discourage the conversion of agricultural land to other uses unless all of the following findings can be made:
- The net community benefit derived from conversion of the land outweighs the need to protect the land for long-term agricultural use;
 - There are no feasible alternative locations for the proposed use that would appreciably reduce impacts upon agricultural lands; and
 - The use will not have significant adverse effects, or can mitigate such effects, upon existing and future adjacent agricultural lands and operations. (New)
- AG 1.6 Interrelationship with Habitat Conservation:** Permit agriculturally designated lands to be used for habitat conservation and/or mitigation with approval of a development agreement, provided such use does not interfere or adversely affect existing or planned agricultural uses or impact County flood control operations. (Existing/Modified 6.A-5 & 1.F-2)
- AG 1.7 Residential Uses:** Limit residential uses on agriculturally designated land to residences needed to support agricultural farming operations, agricultural-related tourism, agricultural support services, and permitted residential homesites. Permanent residential densities shall be limited to those permitted by the underlying agricultural land use designation (1 residence per 20, 40, or 80 acres). (New)
- AG 1.8 Homesites:** Allow a landowner to create a homesite parcel on an agricultural parcel subject to the following:
- Only one homesite parcel may be created for each legal parcel that existed as of (date of GPU approval).
 - Parcels that are non-conforming with the minimum parcel size required by the underlying agricultural land use designation may not apply for the creation of a homesite parcel. (New)
 - Homesite parcels shall be the minimum size necessary to comply with Environmental Health and buffering requirements and shall not exceed 3 acres unless the County Environmental Health Division grants a waiver for sewage disposal, in which case a parcel of up to 5 acres may be allowed. (Existing/Modified 6.A-6)
 - Homesite parcels may not be further subdivided. (New)
 - Ownership of a homesite parcel must be retained by the same owner who owned the parcel at the time the parcel was created for a period no less than 5 years. (New)
 - The landowner must grant development rights for the remaining agricultural parcel to Sutter County or its designee. The remainder parcel shall meet the minimum parcel size of the underlying

agricultural land use designation (20, 40, or 80 acres). Residential densities shall be limited to those permitted by the underlying agricultural land use designation. (Existing/Modified 6.A-4)

- AG 1.9 Williamson Act:** Promote the use of the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) on agricultural lands throughout the County provided the State continues to fund the subvention program to offset the loss of property taxes. (New)
- AG 1.10 Transfer of Development Rights:** Explore, and if determined feasible, implement programs to permanently preserve agricultural lands through the use of voluntary transfer of development rights to guide development to more suitable areas. (Existing/Modified Implementation 6.4 and 6.5)
- AG 1.11 Conservation Easements:** Explore, and if determined feasible, identify agricultural mitigation bank areas in which the County will encourage private landowners to voluntarily participate in agricultural conservation easements. (Existing/Modified Implementation 6.5)
- AG 1.12 Land Mitigation Program:** Explore, and if determined feasible, create an Agricultural Land Mitigation Program. (Existing/Modified Implementation 6.5)
- AG 1.13 Cooperation with Other Agencies:** Coordinate with the cities, Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO), local service providers, and other relevant agencies on joint mechanisms to preserve agricultural lands and limit urban encroachment and the extension of urban service and infrastructure into agricultural areas. (New)

Minimize Conflicts between Agricultural Operations and Other Uses

Goal AG 2

Minimize conflicts between agricultural uses and operations and adjacent non-agricultural uses. (New)

Policies:

AG 2.1

Minimize Conflicts: Require that new development adjacent to agricultural areas be designed to minimize conflicts with adjacent agricultural uses and operations. (Existing/Modified Implementation 1 F-1 and 1 F-4)

AG 2.2

Right to Farm: Affirm and protect the right of agricultural operators in agricultural areas to continue their agricultural practices (“right to farm”). The right to farm shall acknowledge through noticing that landowners and residents adjacent to agriculture should be prepared, accept, and not consider a nuisance the impacts inherent with lawful farming activities. At a minimum, the Right to Farm Notice shall be recorded with the Deed of Trust at the time of transfer of all applicable properties, and shall be included with the property tax bills for the applicable properties. (Existing/Modified Implementation 1 F-3)

AG 2.3

Buffers: Protect agricultural operations from conflicts with non-agricultural uses by requiring buffers between proposed non-agricultural uses and adjacent agricultural operations:

- a. Buffers should be physically and biologically designed to avoid conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses. The biological design should ensure that the buffer does not provide a host environment for pests or carriers of disease which could potentially impact adjacent farming operations.
- b. Buffers shall not be located on the agricultural parcel(s).
- c. Buffers should primarily consist of a physical separation (setback) between agricultural and non-agricultural uses. The appropriate width of the buffer shall be determined on a site-by-site basis taking into account the type of existing agricultural uses (i.e. crop type and associated operational requirements); the nature of the proposed non-agricultural development; the natural features of the site; landscaping, walls or other barriers planned by the proposed development; and any other factors that affect the specific situation.
- d. In addition to a physical separation, the following buffer options may be considered: greenbelts/open space, limited park and recreation areas, roads, PUE’s, waterways, and vegetative screens. These buffering options may be used in any combination to most effectively reduce conflicts arising from adjacent incompatible uses.

- e. An ongoing maintenance program for the buffer shall be established and should include vector controls.
- f. Buffer restrictions may be removed if all adjacent parcels have been irreversibly converted to non-agricultural uses. (Existing/Modified Implementation 1 F-4)

AG 2.4 **Coordination with Cities:** Coordinate with the cities to ensure that new development in the cities mitigates impacts upon unincorporated agricultural uses and operations including the provision of right to farm notifications and buffering on city development projects. (New)

Preserve Natural Resources for Agriculture (Sustainability)

Goal AG 3

Protect the natural resources needed to ensure that agriculture remains an essential and sustainable part of Sutter County's future. (New)

Policies:

AG 3.1 **Efficient Water Management:** Support the efficient management and use of agricultural water resources where economically feasible to support agriculture. (New)

AG 3.2 **Water Conservation and Recycling:** Support the efforts of the multiple water agencies operating in Sutter County to adopt water conservation practices and explore the feasibility of water recycling for agriculture. (New)

AG 3.3 **Water Quality and Quantity:** Maintain water resource quality and quantity for the irrigation of productive farmland. (New)

AG 3.4 **Water Competition from Urban Uses:** Oppose the loss of agricultural water due to competition from urban water consumption both within and outside the County. (New)

AG 3.5 **Groundwater Resources:** Support the efforts of the local water agencies to promote groundwater recharge, conjunctive use, conservation of significant recharge areas, and other activities to protect and manage Sutter County's groundwater resources. (New)

- AG 3.6** **Alternative Energy:** Support the use of energy-saving technologies and alternative energy sources (solar, wind, biofuels) in all agricultural industries and operations such as the pumping of irrigation water, food processing, and water treatment. Support the use of alternative energy-powered farm vehicles and trucks. (New)
- AG 3.7** **Habitat Protection:** Promote wildlife friendly agricultural practices. Encourage habitat protection and management that is compatible with and does not preclude or restrict on-site agricultural production. (New)
- AG 3.8** **Chemical Use:** Support the efforts of growers to follow state and federal regulations concerning the use of pesticides, herbicides, and manufactured fertilizers. (New)

Expand and Diversify Agricultural Industries

Goal AG 4

Provide for growth, expansion, and diversification of Sutter County's agricultural industries. (Existing/Modified 6 B-1)

Policies:

Agricultural Infrastructure and Support

- AG 4.1** **Transportation Systems:** Maintain existing regional transportation systems to support the local, national, and global movement of agricultural products. Support the extension of freight rail into Sutter County's industrial areas. (New)
- AG 4.2** **Utility Infrastructure:** Implement mechanisms to provide the utility infrastructure, flood protection, and services necessary to lands designated for industrial use in order to support the growth and expansion of Sutter County's agriculture industries. (New)
- AG 4.3** **New Technologies:** Support the development and use of new technologies that facilitate resource efficient operation of agriculturally related industries, including food processing. These technologies may include: energy development technologies, such as wind, solar and waste sources; energy and water conservation technologies; cultivation practices; global positioning system (GPS) applications; and others that improve the profitability of agriculture in Sutter County. (New)

AG 4.4 Farmworker Housing: Collaborate with incorporated cities, rural communities, the agricultural industry, and housing developers to provide affordable housing for farmworkers. (Existing/Modified 6.A-3)

Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion

AG 4.5 Agricultural Industries: Promote the growth and expansion of existing agricultural industries as well as the development of new and diverse agricultural production, processing, and distribution industries within Sutter County. (Existing/Modified 6 B-3 & 6 B-2)

AG 4.6 Local Processing: Support the local processing and distribution of agricultural products grown in Sutter County and other nearby locations. (Existing/Modified 6 B-2)

AG 4.7 Local Purchasing: Promote Sutter County farmers' efforts to market their produce locally including the purchase and consumption of locally-grown and processed foods by local households, institutions, and businesses. (New)

AG 4.8 Market Expansion: Support efforts to expand regional, national, and foreign markets for the export of local agricultural products. (Existing/Modified 6 B-4)

AG 4.9 Efficient Permit Processing: Provide for commercial agricultural permit processing procedures that are expeditious and efficient. As appropriate, apply improvement standards and requirements, such as standards for parking and impermeable surfaces, which are reduced or minimized to reflect the nature of the agricultural operations. (New)

AG 4.10 Training and Support: Support the efforts of the Agricultural Commissioner's office, the UC Small Farm Center, UC Cooperative Extension, the Small Business Development Centers, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the Resource Conservation District (RCD), and other agencies to provide technical assistance, research, employee training, and capital for emerging agricultural businesses. (New)

AG 4.11 One-Stop Center: Support the creation and operation of a "one stop shop" agricultural resource business center housing multiple agricultural related agencies and businesses, including the Sutter County Agricultural Commissioner and County Farm Advisor/UC Cooperative Extension. (New)

Siting Agriculture Support Uses

- AG 4.12** **Support Uses:** Facilitate agricultural production by allowing agriculture related support uses, such as processing, storage, packaging, and soil preparation services, to be conveniently and accessibly located in agricultural production areas when related to the primary agricultural production in the area. Such uses shall be allowed by discretionary permit approval, subject to all of the following criteria:
- a. The use shall provide a 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 operation characteristics;
 - b. The use should not be sited on productive agricultural land if less productive land is available in the immediate vicinity;
 - c. The operational or physical characteristics of the use shall not have a significant adverse impact on water resources or the use or management of surrounding agricultural properties (New)

Promote Visitor Services (Agri-tourism)

GOAL AG 5

Promote visitor services and attractions to enhance and support Sutter County's agricultural industries. (New)

Policies:

AG 5.1 **Promotional Activities:** Encourage a wide variety of promotional and marketing activities that support Sutter County's unique agricultural heritage. These may include agricultural related festivals and farmers' markets. (Existing/Modified B-6)

AG 5.2 **Visitor Serving Uses:** Allow visitor-serving uses in agricultural designated areas through discretionary permit approval, subject to all of the following criteria:

- a. The use shall promote and market agricultural related products the majority of which should be grown or processed in the local area;
- b. The use is compatible with and secondary and incidental to agricultural production activities in the area;
- c. The use will not require the extension of municipal sewer or water services;
- d. The use is compatible with existing adjacent uses in the area; and

- e. The use is not a hotel, motel, resort or similar scale lodging, which is not permitted. (New)

AG 5.3 Marketing Coordination: Collaborate with economic development organizations to increase the marketing of Sutter County and coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions to support a regional approach to agri-tourism. (New)

AG 5.4 Recreational Uses: Support recreational uses on privately-owned lands where such uses are compatible with on and off-site agriculture and with scenic and environmentally sensitive resources. (New)

AG 5.5 Special Events: Allow for farm home-stays, bed and breakfasts, and special events such as weddings in agricultural areas, subject to discretionary permit approval. (New)

AG 5.6 Agricultural Organizations: Promote events sponsored by organizations such as school districts, colleges, UC Cooperative Extension, UC Small Farm Center, the Agricultural Commissioner, 4-H, the Farm Bureau, or other programs which expose the public to agricultural activities and issues. (Existing/Modified 6 B-7)