

Agriculture

Background

Before the arrival of the Spanish, the coastal plain of Goleta was dominated by wandering streams, riparian corridors, wetlands, oak woodlands, chaparral, coastal sage scrub and extensive grasslands. The beginnings of agriculture here coincided with the colonization of the Spanish, and establishment of the mission in the late 1700s. Within 100 years, the entire valley was converted to farms and ranches. Then, as now, farmers recognized that our extremely fertile soils, southern exposure and mild climate created a world class environment for raising a wide variety of crops.

However, by the end of the 20th century, large agricultural blocks had been consumed by residential, commercial and industrial development. Many of our remaining farms are but small remnants of these large agricultural tracts. Our farmers now find themselves surrounded by urban development and subject to ever increasing pressure to convert to non-agricultural use. While current County policies provide strong language to protect agriculture, they do allow decision makers (at both local and State levels) flexibility to approve or deny the conversion of agricultural lands, at their discretion.

Presently, 2,043 of the 6,438 zoned agriculture acres are in production in our area, avocados being the dominant crop, with lemons and rotational crops constituting the remainder. However, changing markets, restrictions and regulations, and economic scales of farming have created new challenges for all small farmers. In addition, Goleta Valley farmers must deal with the increasing cost of water and water meters and lack of affordable housing for workers.

Most Goleta Valley residents welcome and applaud the benefits of urban farms. They shop at local farm outlets and farmers markets; savoring the knowledge that what comes to their tables is grown in our community. As well as providing fresh local produce, expanses of agricultural lands, even small ones, offer refreshing contrasts to existing urban patterns. In addition, they allow us uninterrupted sweeping mountain views. And, for many long-term residents, the remaining agricultural lands are a vivid and poignant reminder of the rich agricultural history of the Goleta Valley.

Despite all the benefits, urban agriculture is vanishing. Over 1,000 acres of agricultural land has disappeared from the Eastern Goleta Valley in the last three decades¹. While some of the challenges to farming have been noted above, the dominant issue in preserving agricultural lands here is the heavy demand for housing, and inflated land values. These trends have significantly intensified already existing pressure to convert farms into residential areas. Clearly these conversions are irreversible. Once a decision is made to rezone parcels from agriculture to urban, the ability to farm these areas is lost forever.

¹ *Goleta Valley Urban Agricultural Newsletter*, August 2002, Pg. 5.

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2 **The Future**

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4 During the course of our meetings, the GVC learned of the many disheartening trends
5 emerging with regard to agriculture. The information presented painted a bleak future for
6 farming in our area. However, we are acutely aware that our continuing agricultural
7 heritage places the Goleta Valley amid a small and unique group of communities. And,
8 although urbanization has covered most of southern California's rich farmland, we
9 remain committed to having our valley be a place where neighborhoods and businesses
10 co-exist in harmony with agriculture.

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12 The future of agriculture in the eastern Goleta Valley depends on establishing priorities
13 that place it as a vital component of our community. It should be remembered that
14 agricultural land is not public open space, but private property engaged in an often
15 visually pleasing enterprise. If it is to remain, we must look at ways to ensure agricultural
16 economic viability. Of paramount importance is to raise public awareness of the
17 importance of farming. We must also look at ways to maintain compatibility with other
18 land uses. It is also extremely important that we guarantee a consistent and reasonably
19 priced water supply, offer assistance and incentives for farmers, and provide housing for
20 farm workers. One additional way to support farmers is by allowing them more flexibility
21 in farming choices. Keeping agriculture profitable is central to continuing a balanced
22 local economy and holding on to our small-town feel and lifestyle. We believe it can be
23 done and offer our vision, goals and steps to achieve these goals in the following pages.

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Vision Statement

Agriculture is a **vital element in the mix of land use** and sustainable economic activity

Goal #1: Protect agricultural lands from encroachment by residential and commercial development

How Will We Know a Success

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- 1. No net loss of productive, economically viable agricultural lands.
- 2. Policies in place to enhance, promote, and protect agriculture

Steps to Achieve Goal

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- 1. Establish an articulate, informed voice in local decisions and county land-use policies and practices
- 2. Avoid intensification of residential development in areas abutting agricultural land
- 3. Avoid land use incompatibility by requiring that any new development adjoining the agricultural parcels have sufficient buffer zones
- 4. Work with Public Land Trusts to identify and procure development rights on productive land, thereby insuring their viability as agricultural operations

1 **Vision Statement**

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3 Agriculture is a vital element in the mix of land use and **sustainable economic activity**

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5 **Goal #2:** Protect opportunities for sustainable agriculture

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7 **How Will We Know a Success** 38

8 1. No net loss of productive, 39

9 economically viable agricultural 40

10 lands 41

11 2. Recognition of agricultural
12 enterprises as a primary key to
13 maintaining the semi-rural
14 landscape of the eastern Goleta
15 Valley

16 3. Local distribution opportunities
17 exist

18 4. A diversified labor/service pool is
19 supporting local agriculture

20 5. The proportion of organic farms has
21 increased

22 6. Programs exist that educate school
23 children, and involve them in a way
24 that helps them realize the inherent
25 value of locally grown produce

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41 **Steps to Achieve Goal**

42 1. Create and enhance incentives to
43 keep agricultural lands in agriculture

44 2. Work with water agencies to ensure
45 efficient utilization and protection of
46 the local water supply

47 3. Work with local water agencies to
48 establish rates that ensure the
49 economic viability of agriculture

50 4. Encourage and support ways that
51 allow agriculture to maximize its
52 flexibility to ensure profitability

53 5. Facilitate the construction of a small-
54 scale distribution center that provides
55 increased opportunities for locally
56 grown produce to reach local,
57 national and worldwide markets

58 6. Provide adequate housing and
59 services for farm workers

60 7. Expand our unique, clean and cost-
61 effective biological pest control,
62 fertilization and organic farming
63 programs

64 8. Provide a mechanism for farmers to
65 share information on, and advances
66 in, farming techniques

67 9. Invite our community to learn about
68 agriculture and its importance to our
69 local balanced economy

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