SANTA BARBARA COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

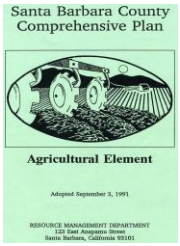
AGRICULTURAL ELEMENT

ADOPTED 1991

REPUBLISHED MAY 2009

County of Santa Barbara
Planning and Development
123 E. Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

The electronic version of the Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan can be found at: http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org



Former Agricultural Element Cover – Replaced March 2009

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The Agricultural Element was processed under Resource Management Department Case No. 81-GP-3, and first was adopted on September 3, 1991 by Resolution No. 91-537 of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors. [1]

PREAMBLE

Agriculture is vital to the needs of the nation and the world. Agriculture is the largest production industry in Santa Barbara County and contributes a very large inflow of money into the county's economy. The County, therefore, recognizes the need to protect and maintain a healthy economy and to provide for the conservation of its agriculture. The uniqueness and importance of agriculture in Santa Barbara County requires a specific planning document to guide the county government in addressing the future use of agricultural lands and resources.

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DEFINITIONS

AGRICULTURE: The production of food and fiber, the growing of plants, the raising and keeping of animals, aquaculture, and preparation for marketing of products in their natural form when grown on the premises, and the sale of products which are accessory and customarily incidental to the marketing of products in their natural form grown on the premises.

AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT: Agricultural activities or structures on agriculturally designated land which are not subject to building, grading, or brush-clearing permits. These activities and structures may be subject to special agricultural building, agricultural grading, or special agricultural brush-clearing permits.

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: Any agricultural building, structure, practice, or operation that a) requires a building, grading, or brush-clearing permit on land designated for agriculture; and/or b) is located on land which has had no history of cultivation; and/or c) is on land not designated for agriculture. A permit solely for plumbing or electricity shall not constitute a standard building permit.

AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT USE: Uses such as the sorting and processing of local fruits and vegetables, wineries, or feed distribution; that are a necessary and integral part of maintaining on-premise production and marketing, and that are directly associated with onsite agricultural or ornamental crop, or animal raising operations. Other uses permitted by Conditional Use Permit in an agricultural district such as oil drilling are not to be construed as an agricultural support use.

FEED DISTRIBUTION: The temporary storage and dispersal of animal feed for the purpose of supporting the primary onsite animal raising activities. The use may include, for secondary purposes, the offsite dispersal of feed on an incidental basis, when not for the purpose of profit resale or of providing a regional service.

GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL I. Santa Barbara County shall assure and enhance the continuation of agriculture as a major viable production industry in Santa Barbara Country. Agriculture shall be encouraged. Where conditions allow, (taking into account environmental impacts) expansion and intensification shall be supported.

Policy IA. The integrity of agricultural operations shall not be violated by recreational or other non-compatible uses.

Imposition of any condition requiring an offer of dedication of a recreational trail or other recreational easement shall be discretionary (determined on a case-by-case basis), and in exercising its discretion, the County shall consider the impact of such an easement upon agricultural production of all lands affected by and adjacent to said trail or other easement.

1. On lands which are in agricultural production and have a zoning or Comprehensive Plan designation for agriculture, provisions for recreational trails or other recreational easements defined in the Comprehensive Plan may be imposed by the County as a condition for a discretionary permit or land division only in the following circumstances:

    a. The area in which the trail is proposed to be located is land which is not under cultivation or being grazed or is not part of a rotation program, or is not an integral part of the agricultural operations on the parcel; or,

    b. The land use permit requested is not for a use which is compatible with agricultural production on the property, as defined in the County Agricultural Preserve Uniform Rules. In this instance, the recreational trail or other recreational use shall be required to be located only on the portion of the property taken out of agricultural production for the permit; or,

    c. The land division requested requires a rezoning of the property to a more intensive zone district than that applied to the property prior to the application.

2. A recreational trail or other recreational use shall not be required as a condition for a discretionary permit (except a land division or a rezone which permits a smaller minimum parcel size than that permitted on the property at the time of the application) on lands which are in agricultural production and have a zoning or Comprehensive Plan designation for agriculture, in the following circumstances:

a. The permit requested is for a lot line adjustment or Minor Conditional Use Permit only; or,

b. The discretionary permit requested is compatible with the agricultural use of the land, as defined in the County Agricultural Preserve Uniform Rules.

3. The following trails shall not be subject to paragraphs 1 and 2 above due to their historic and recreational significance:

   Franklin Trail
   Arroyo Burro Trail
   Fremont Trail
   San Antonio Canyon Trail

4. Where trails are required, they shall be sited to minimize the impacts to prime soils, agricultural operations, public safety, and environmentally sensitive areas.

Policy I.B. The County shall recognize the rights of operation, freedom of choice as to the methods of cultivation, choice of crops or types of livestock, rotation of crops and all other functions within the traditional scope of agricultural management decisions. These rights and freedoms shall be conducted in a manner which is consistent with: (1) sound agricultural practices that promote the long-term viability of agriculture and (2) applicable resource protection policies and regulations.

Policy I.C. To increase agricultural productivity, the County shall encourage land improvement programs.

Policy I.D. The use of the Williamson Act (Agricultural Preserve Program) shall be strongly encouraged and supported. The County shall also explore and support other agricultural land protection programs.

Policy I.E. The County shall recognize that the generation of noise, smoke, odor, and dust is a natural consequence of the normal agricultural practices provided that agriculturalists exercise reasonable measures to minimize such effects.

Policy I.F. The quality and availability of water, air, and soil resources shall be protected through provisions including but not limited to, the stability of Urban/Rural Boundary Lines, maintenance of buffer areas around agricultural areas, and the promotion of conservation practices.

Policy I.G. Sustainable agricultural practices on agriculturally designated land should be encouraged in order to preserve the long-term health and viability of the soil.

GOAL II. Agricultural lands shall be protected from adverse urban influence.

Policy II.A. Santa Barbara County shall require measures designed for the prevention of flooding and silting from urbanization, especially as such damage relates to approved development.

Policy II.B. Santa Barbara County shall recognize, and give high priority to, the need for protection from trespass, thievery, vandalism, roaming dogs, etc., on all agricultural lands.

Policy II.C. Santa Barbara County shall discourage the extension by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) of urban spheres of influence into productive agricultural lands designated Agriculture II (A-II) or Commercial Agriculture (AC) under the Comprehensive Plan.

Policy II.D. Conversion of highly productive agricultural lands whether urban or rural, shall be discouraged. The County shall support programs which encourage the retention of highly productive agricultural lands.

GOAL III. Where it is necessary for agricultural lands to be converted to other uses, this use shall not interfere with remaining agricultural operations.

Policy III.A. Expansion of urban development into active agricultural areas outside of urban limits is to be discouraged, as long as infill development is available.

Policy III.B. It is a County priority to retain blocks of productive agriculture within Urban Areas where reasonable, to continue to explore programs to support that use, and to recognize the importance of the objectives of the County's Right to Farm Ordinance.

GOAL IV. Recognizing that agriculture can enhance and protect natural resources, agricultural operations should be encouraged to incorporate such techniques as soil conservation and sound fire risk reduction practices.

Policy IV.A. Major wildfires cause severe erosion, property damage, and safety hazards. The County shall encourage range improvement and fire hazard reduction programs, including prescribed burning of brush and alternative non-burning techniques. Such programs shall be designed and conducted to avoid excessive erosion and other significant adverse effects on the environment for the purpose of increasing water yields, improving wildlife habitat, wildlife protection, and increasing agricultural productivity.

Policy IV.B. Because of fire-risk reduction or soil instability, the use of certain slopes for agricultural production may be preferable to leaving the land in its natural state, or allowing non-agricultural development provided that adverse effects are minimized.

Policy IV.C. Grading and brush clearing for new agricultural improvements on hillsides shall not cause excessive erosion or downslope damage.

GOAL V. Santa Barbara County shall allow areas and installations for those supportive activities needed as an integral part of the production and marketing process on and/or off the farm.

Policy V.A. Santa Barbara County shall permit on-farm supportive installations for product handling and selling as prescribed in the Uniform Rules of the County's Agricultural Preserve Program.

Policy V.B. Santa Barbara County should allow areas for supportive agricultural services within reasonable distance and access to the farm user.

GOAL VI: The County should make effective-provision for access to agricultural areas and for the necessary movement of agricultural crops and equipment.

Policy VI.A. To the maximum extent feasible, the County Public Works Department shall design roads with the type and size of vehicles and/or equipment in mind which are used in the agricultural operations of the area.

AGRICULTURAL LAND USE DEFINITIONS[2]

The purpose of an agricultural designation is to preserve agricultural land for the cultivation of crops and the raising of animals.

For the purposes of this Element, agriculture shall be defined as the production of food and fiber, the growing of plants, the raising and keeping of animals, aquaculture, and the preparation for marketing of products in their natural form when grown on the premises, and the sale of products which are accessory and customarily incidental to the marketing of products in their natural form grown on the premises. Lands eligible for this designation include, but are not limited to, lands with prime soils, prime agricultural land, grazing land, land in existing agricultural use, land with agricultural potential, and lands under Williamson Act contracts.

Plant crops include food and fiber crops, orchards and vineyards, field crops, and crops grown in nurseries, and greenhouses. Animal raising includes raising and keeping of horses, grazing, and stock raising activities. In addition to such uses, agricultural lands may be utilized for a limited number of other uses, including appropriate related or incidental residential uses; and the preparation for marketing of products as allowed under the appropriate zoning districts. Public works, public service, public utility and oil drilling uses which are found to be compatible with agriculture may also be permitted.

The following designations provide a description of agricultural lands that identify the more essential and productive agricultural areas as well as the average, and marginally productive lands. These land use designations have the following priority ranking for the identification of agricultural value:

1. AC Agriculture Commercial
2. A-II Agriculture - II
3. A-I Agriculture - I

<u>Agriculture-Commercial (AC) (40 - 320 or more acre minimum parcel size)</u>

This category is for commercially farmed, privately owned land located within either Rural, Inner-Rural, Existing Developed Rural Neighborhoods or Urban Areas which meets the following criteria:

1. The land is subject to a Williamson Act Contract, including contracts that have been non-renewed, or
2. Parcels forty (40) acres or greater, whether or not currently being used for agriculture but otherwise eligible for Williamson Act Contract, may be included if they meet requirements of Uniform Rule No. 6.

This category includes compatible land uses and land uses that are necessary and a part of the agricultural operations. All types of crops and livestock are included. Both

"prime" and "non-prime" soils (as defined in the Williamson Act and the County's Uniform Rule No. 6) and irrigated and non-irrigated lands are included.

Parcels which are smaller than forty (40) acres in size at the time of adoption of this Element, may be eligible for the AC designation if they are "prime" or "super-prime" as defined by the County Uniform Rules and are eligible for agricultural preserve status.

Agriculture I (A-I) (5 or more acres minimum parcel size)

This designation applies to acreages of prime and non-prime farm lands and agricultural uses which are located within Urban, Inner Rural, and Rural Neighborhood areas.

Agriculture II (A-II) (40 or more acres minimum parcel size)

This designation applies to acreages of farm lands and agricultural uses located outside Urban, Inner Rural and Rural Neighborhood areas. General agriculture is permitted, including but not limited to livestock operations, grazing, and beef production as well as more intensive agriculture uses.

Agricultural Industry Overlay

The purpose of this overlay designation is, not withstanding other provisions of this Plan, to provide for agriculturally related commercial and industrial uses in Rural Areas where appropriate. Development Plans and Conditional Use Permits shall be required pursuant to applicable zoning ordinances.

1. The request for the designation must be accompanied by a Development Plan and Conditional Use Permit, information outlining the reasons why it is necessary to put this overlay in the Rural Area, and must satisfy the following criteria:

    a. The- use must be directly related to agriculture.

    b. Special circumstances require that the project be located within the Rural Area.

    c. The placement of the designation will provide particular and specific benefits which will advance the purposes and policies of this Plan.

    d. The proposed site is currently designated as "A-II Agriculture-II" and is located within the Rural Area.

    e. The use is not otherwise permitted under the agricultural land use designations of the Land Use Element and Zoning Ordinances.

    f. The project site should not include prime soils, or environmentally sensitive areas where development would result in significant adverse impacts.

g. The overlay shall not be applied where it would have a significant adverse impact on adjacent residential areas.

h. The placement of the designation will not represent a significant cumulative loss of agricultural land in the planning area.

The criteria set forth under Number 1 above, do not have to be met with respect to uses on lands designated with the “Agricultural Industry Overlay” prior to the date of the adoption of this Plan.

2. The following uses may be allowed with a Conditional Use Permit and Development Plan as required pursuant to applicable Zoning Ordinances: processing, packaging, treatment, and/or sale of agricultural commodities, transportation facilities required to support agriculture; and fertilizer manufacturing.

BACKGROUND ON AGRICULTURE IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

The Agricultural Element acknowledges that agriculture is a significant and important resource within Santa Barbara County; therefore, the Element has been created to enhance and protect that resource. To provide a context for understanding and analyzing the proposed Agricultural Element, this section will provide general information on agriculture in Santa Barbara County and will briefly discuss current problems and issues concerning agriculture.

1. OVERVIEW OF THE COUNTY

There are approximately 1,756,000 total acres in Santa Barbara County, including the Los Padres National Forest, Vandenberg Air Force Base, and the Channel Islands. According to data compiled by the State Department of Conservation for the Important Farmlands Map for Santa Barbara County, these lands can be classified as follows: (October 28, 1985)

Prime Farmland	70,180 acres	Land which has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops
Farmland of Statewide Importance	5,750 acres	Land which has a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for production of crops
Unique Farmland	29,130 acres	Land that is used for the production of specific high economic value crops
Farmland of Local Importance	30,410 acres	Land that is currently producing crops, or has the capability of production.
Grazing Land	1,201,810 acres	Land that is suitable for grazing; includes lands within the Los Padres Forest
Urban and Built-up Land	51,400 acres	Lands in urban use.
Other Lands	367,900 acres	Lands not included in any of the other categories, plus Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel, and Santa Barbara Islands.
TOTAL	1,756,000 acres	

These acreage figures indicate that there are some 105,060 acres of irrigated farmland in the County (prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmlands). In addition, there are 1,337,280 acres of grazing and dry-farmed land (Local Farmlands and Grazing). The total irrigated and non-irrigated agricultural acreage in 1985 was 1,442,340 acres. It should be noted that the grazing category includes lands within the Los Padres National Forest that are leased for grazing operations.

Santa Barbara County is considered a major agricultural producer. Of the 58 counties in the State of California, Santa Barbara County ranks 16th in gross agricultural value and 28th nationally among the over 3,000 counties.

Historically, agriculture has been the #1 industry in Santa Barbara County. In 1990, gross income from agricultural production was $515,590,385 million (source: 1990 Agricultural Production Report). This exceeds the gross agricultural income from any previous year.

Unlike many areas, the County is not dependent on a few major crops for the majority of the County's agricultural income. Table 1-1 contains information from the 1990 Agricultural Production Report on the 1990 value of and the acreage devoted to various crops or products produced within Santa Barbara County. The table includes only those commodities which generated at least a million dollars in 1990. As Table 1-1 indicates, in 1990, the County had 37 different commodities that generate in excess of $1 million in income.

Much of the success of agriculture in this county can be attributed to the area's climate. The Farm Advisor's Office estimates that about one-half of the County's production is made possible by the uniqueness of the climate. Crops such as flower seeds, avocados, lemons, orchids, garbanzo beans and lima beans are grown competitively in the area because of the climate.

TABLE 1-1

MILLION DOLLAR AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES 1989

1989

1989 Ranking	Crop/Product	Acreage	Value
1	Strawberries	2,611	$ 60,761,746
2	Broccoli	17,385	40,119,411
3	Lettuce	7,573	31,281,249
4	Cattle & Calves	n.a	29,770,911
5	Cauliflower	7,466	22,999,674
6	Avocados	10,422	21,804,828
7	Celery	2,792	15,124,970
8	Grapes, wine	9,000	14,021,760
9	Chrysanthemums	n.a	13,605,972
10	Flowering Plants	n.a	7,883,756
11	Miscellaneous Flowers	n.a	7,729,122
12	Ornamentals & Ground Cover	n.a	6,383,070
13	Milk & Milk Products	n.a	5,889,097
14	Lemons	1,652	5,624,313
15	Flower Seeds	1,053	5,620,800
16	Orchid Plants	n.a	5,559,990

Source: 1989 Agricultural Production Report, Santa Barbara County.

Table 1-2 contains historical information on agricultural income in the County by major crop group. Table 1-3 shows the income generated by the major crop groups as a percentage of total agricultural income for the given year. Examples of products produced within Santa Barbara County which make up these five crops groups are as follows:

Vegetable Crops	Flowers & Ornamentals
Broccoli	Chrysanthemums
Lettuce	Flowering Plants
Cauliflower	Orchid Plants & Flowers
Celery	Gypsophilia
Cabbage	Flower seeds

Fruit & Nut Crops	Field Crops
Strawberries	Dry Beans
Avocados	Alfalfa Hay
Grapes, wine	Grain
Lemons	Bean Seeds

Animal Industries
Cattle & Calves
Milk & Milk Products

As indicated by the historical data provided in Tables 1-2 and 1-3, agriculture in Santa Barbara County has moved away from animal industries and dry farming to more intensive types of farming. Where animal industries were once the leader in terms of their contribution to County agricultural income, these industries have been succeeded by the more intensive agriculture represented by vegetables, fruits & nuts and flowers & ornamentals. Field crops have been surpassed in annual income by the growing of flowers and ornamentals.

TABLE 1-2

AGRICULTURAL INCOME

(in millions of dollars)

Crop Groups	1953	1963	1973	1983	1989
Vegetable Crops	15.8	14.8	54.3	131.2	181.2
Fruits & Nuts	9.1	12.9	26.5	57.8	162.9
Flowers & Ornament.	2.7	5.1	15.2	50.9	77.1
Animal Industries	19.5	21.9	39.2	50.6	46.2
Field Crops	6.8	12.1	16.9	28.2	13.8
Totals	53.9	66.8	152.2	318.8	481.2

Source: Agricultural Commissioner's Annual Crop Reports.

TABLE 1-3

INCOME OF MAJOR AGRICULTURAL CROP GROUPS AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL AGRICULTURAL INCOME

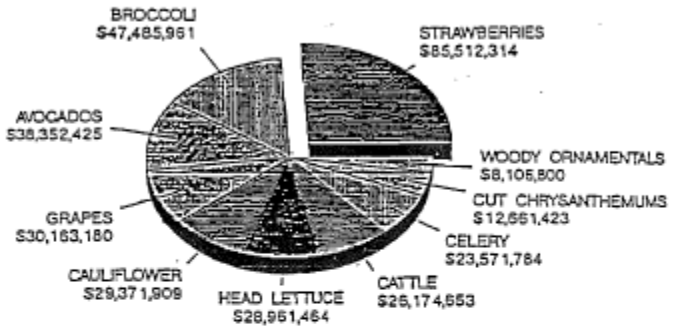
(in millions of dollars)

Crop Groups	1953	1963	1973	1983	1989
Vegetable Crops	29%	22%	36%	41%	37%
Fruits & Nuts	17%	19%	17%	18%	34%
Flowers & Ornament.	5%	8%	10%	16%	16%
Animal Industries	36%	33%	26%	16%	10%
Field Crops	13%	18%	11%	9%	3%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

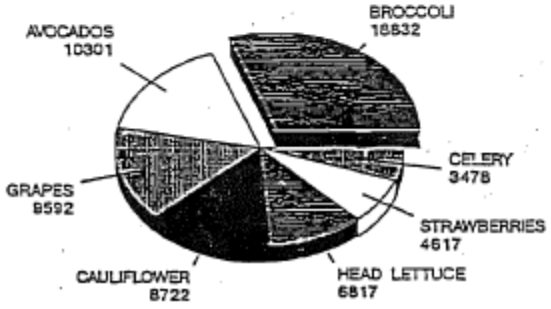
Source: Agricultural Commissioner's Annual Crop Reports.

FIGURE 1

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
THE TOP TEN PRODUCTS

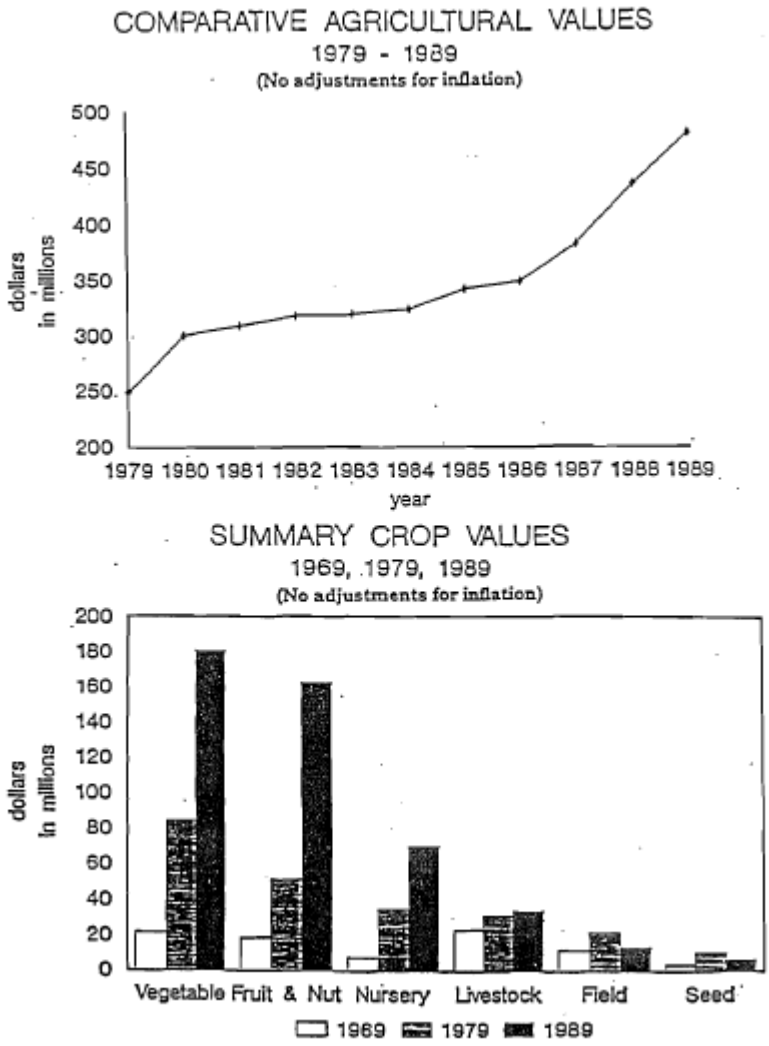


LEADING CROP ACREAGES
1989



Source: Agricultural Commissioner's Annual Crop Reports.

FIGURE 2

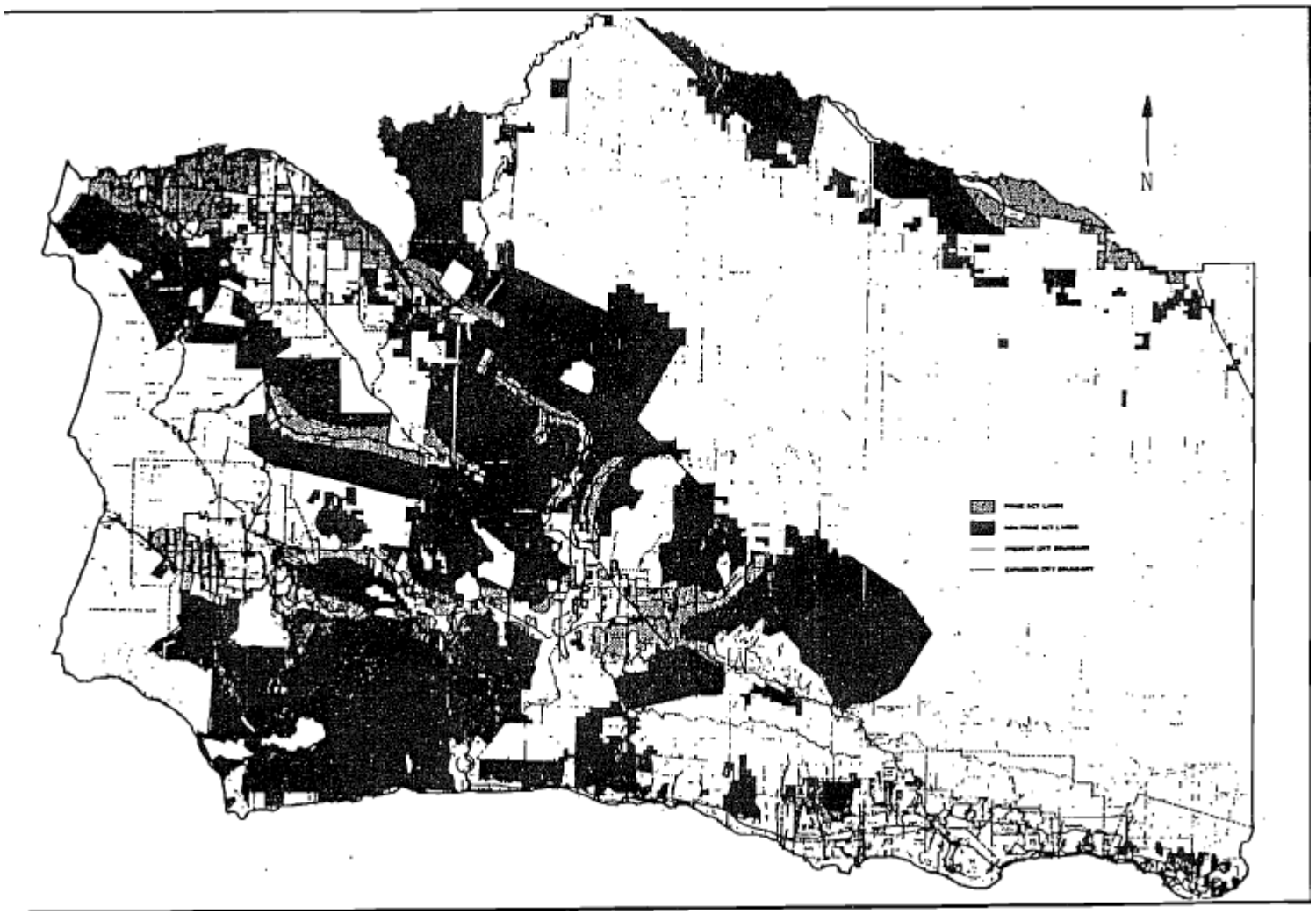


Source: Agricultural Commissioner's Annual Crop Reports.

As Table 1-1 illustrates, the income producing potential of an acre of some of the fruits and vegetables is staggering in comparison to that of some of the field crops and irrigated pasture land. For instance, in 1989 an acre of strawberries produced income of $18,521 while an acre of alfalfa produced $895. Celery yields $6,777 per acre while dry beans produce $858 per acre. This data may provide an explanation of the shift to more intensive types of agriculture within the County.

The County's commitment to the preservation of agriculture is demonstrated by strength of its Agriculture Preserve program. Currently, there are 950 agricultural preserve contracts in the County. These contracts now cover 2,001 parcels which contain a total of 531,400 acres. Figure 3 displays the location of the existing preserves throughout the County. While the majority of agricultural preserves were created during the 1960s and 1970s, a number of new preserves have been established over the past ten years. Since 1977, additional lands have been enrolled in the Cuyama area, Los Alamos, and along the Gaviota Coast, including some lands just west of Goleta. In recent years, approximately ten new preserves have been created annually. The 531,400 acres currently enrolled in the program represent 78 percent of the approximately 680,000 acres of producing agricultural lands that are in private ownership and, therefore, would be eligible for agricultural preserve status. This is verification of the success of Santa Barbara County's program.

FIGURE 3



Although the Agricultural Preserve Program is the strongest in the rural areas of the county, over 20,000 acres of prime agricultural lands located within one mile of City limits are enrolled in the program. This occurs mostly in the North County.

2. TYPES OF AGRICULTURE BY SUBAREA

Santa Barbara County is roughly rectangular in shape. There are approximately 50 miles between the northern tip of the County and the south coast and an east-west distance of about 65 miles. Elevations range from sea level to 6,800 feet. Within this vast area are various micro-climates which have naturally lead to distinct agricultural sub-regions within the County. This section describes the predominate types of agriculture within each subregion.

2.1 South Coast

The principal areas where agriculture production takes place within the South Coast are the Carpinteria Valley and the area from Goleta to the western extent of this sub-region.

The Carpinteria Valley has been host to intensive agriculture since the 1870s. Currently, greenhouses occupy part of the valley floor. The production of chrysanthemums, orchids, other cut flowers and bedding plants within these greenhouses generates a significant amount of agricultural income. Avocados are planted on the valley floor and on hillsides to the extent that irrigation water is available.

The principal agricultural operations of the western portion of this sub-region include avocados, lemons, flowers and ornamentals, grazing and some vegetable production for sale at local roadside stands. Avocado and lemon production occurs mainly in, the canyons and the hillsides above the Goleta Valley and along the Gaviota Coast. Growth of avocados and lemons in this region is limited to its current acreage by a water moratorium and the nearly complete utilization of the groundwater. The flower and ornamental industries and the areas for the production of vegetables lie either within or adjacent to the Goleta Valley. As a result of this location, these operations face a potential for conflict with the surrounding urban uses.

2.2 Santa Ynez

The Santa Ynez Valley has historically been a major cattle grazing region. However, in recent years, agricultural development has produced a number of commercial horse breeding farms and estate wineries and vineyards. In addition to cattle, wine grapes and horse breeding, the Santa Ynez Valley is also host to the growing of field crops, vegetables, and flower seeds.

There are many potential land use conflicts in this region with the expanding residential, ranchette and tourist land uses. The Valley’s cattlemen are deeply concerned about the parcelization of non-prime lands into inefficient sizes.

2.3 Lompoc

The prime soils and climate of the Lompoc Valley make this area ideal for production of a variety of agricultural crops. Intensive agriculture began here in 1875. Apples, cherries and potatoes were the principal crops grown in this region at that time. With the introduction of irrigated agriculture, flower seed, vegetables and beans became the major agriculture commodities of this valley. Lompoc is world renowned for its flower seed industry. Outside of the valley floor, the foothills surrounding Lompoc support productive cattle grazing operations. These operations have been weakening in recent years. As a result, the cattlemen are calling for larger minimum parcel sizes so as to prevent the creation of parcel sizes too small for efficient grazing use.

2.4 Santa Maria Valley

The Santa Maria Valley is the agricultural trade center of the County. This intensive vegetable production region contains the largest area of prime agricultural lands in the County. This area is unique in that many of the farmers' residences, agricultural processing plants and dealerships are located within the City of Santa Maria. The area is well protected from urban encroachment by nearly complete coverage by agricultural preserve contracts. However, the City of Santa Maria is currently engaged in a Sphere of Influence Boundary Study that could potentially affect some 1,500 acres of lands currently enrolled in the County's Agricultural Preserve Program. (City of Santa Maria, Request for Proposal, Sphere of Influence Boundary Study and EIR, November 8, 1988) These agricultural lands are located adjacent to the City's existing east and west boundaries and would be candidates for annexation if included within the City's sphere of influence. Altogether, a total of 2,246 acres of agricultural lands could be affected by this change, representing 6 percent of the area's estimated 40,000 acres of irrigated agriculture. While the area possesses water quality problems, it will continue to be one of the County's most productive agricultural regions.

Vegetables and strawberries account for almost one-half of the area's irrigated acres and together they generate more than half of the county's farm income. In addition to vegetables and strawberries, field crops are grown on fallowed vegetable land and on non-irrigated prime land. Many of the foothills in the Casmalia and Tepusquet areas are used for the growing of wine grapes which are transported out of the Santa Maria Valley for processing. Beef cattle are grazed on the surrounding hillsides.

2.5 Cuyama

The Cuyama Valley is the most distinct region in all of Santa Barbara County. An interior valley at high elevations, the winters are cold and the summers are hot and dry. Rainfall in this region is sparse, averaging only about 5.5 inches per year. The area has grown mainly alfalfa. Given that the groundwater basin is seriously overdrafted, the future of irrigated crops in this area is questionable. The region has experimented with

alternate low water using crops but these have met with limited success. Cattle grazing continues to occupy the hillsides of the Cuyama Valley.

3. ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Agriculture is California is leading industry. With 31 million acres of agricultural land, California is the nation is leading agricultural state. However, in the last 30 years we have witnessed the constant whittling away of this valuable resource. Many of the problems that threaten the viability of agriculture are caused not only by the forces of nature but by humans. Some of the major problems that confront agriculturalists include increasing urbanization and conversion of agricultural lands, water supply problems, water quality problems and soil erosion.

As a coastal county, Santa Barbara County is particularly susceptible to the urban pressures created by an increasing resident population in the State. The growth of urban development into agricultural areas brings with it land use conflicts. As these land use conflicts arise, there is often pressure on local agencies to mediate the concerns through regulatory measures such as permit requirements and conditions on operations. Regulatory measures which are imposed can become costly for agriculturalists and may even interfere with the productivity of their operations. This contributes to the rate of agricultural conversions to other uses, resulting in a vicious cycle which accelerates the loss of agricultural lands.

In addition to the conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses, there is another phenomenon taking place which also threatens the future of agriculture. It is the division of agricultural parcels down to smaller parcel sizes. There are many factors which when taken together determine the economic viability of an agriculture operation. One very important factor is acreage which varies in the amount required depending on many of the other factors such as crop type, soil characteristics, etc. With many agricultural land divisions, although the land is not being converted to urban uses, it is broken up into pieces that are too small to be economically viable agricultural units. Once the economic viability of the land is lost, there is inherently increased pressure for further division of the property and ultimate conversion of the agricultural land to urban uses. Within the State, this phenomenon has become quite prolific. In Santa Barbara County, 113 agriculturally zoned parcels (30,168 total acres) were subdivided into a total of 432 parcels within the five year period from October 1, 1979 to September 30, 1984. Of these, 44 parcels which contained over 100 acres were divided into 233 parcels of which over 50 percent were below 100 acres in size.

The main physical resources of agriculture are land, climate and water. Each of these is essential. Of these, water presents the most difficult challenges in Santa Barbara County. In this County, agriculture depends mainly on groundwater. About 94 percent of agriculture’s water supply is derived from this source. Since, six of the eight major groundwater basins within the County are currently overdrafted, adequate water for long-term agriculture is a major issue. Overall, agricultural water demand accounts for approximately 75 percent of the County’s total water demand. Alternative sources of

water may come at a price that is quite high which could affect the economic viability of county agricultural operations.

According to a report published by the American Farmland Trust, in 12 of California's 20 coastal counties, more than half of the dry-farmed land is losing excessive amounts of soil to erosion. In this county, they have observed gullies four feet deep in some avocado orchards. Because erosion degrades the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of the soil, fertility is reduced. Although erosion is a natural process, cultivated agriculture and overgrazing can accelerate this process. As the erosion process proceeds, a soil's capacity to absorb and retain water diminishes which in turn increases runoff and erosion.

A very large issue concerning agriculture is profitability and economics. The typical squeeze put on farmers between rising costs and diminishing prices causes an apparent downturn in the agricultural economy which we have witnessed in recent years. In turn, this economic downturn has widespread effects on the banking systems, equipment manufacturers and the prosperity of rural communities. The roots of this situation are broad in scope, lying in macroeconomic factors on an international scale, and depend on such influences as foreign trade, unstable monetary conditions, foreign competition, and ineffective and contradictory federal farm policies.

Santa Barbara County is less affected by these gloomy conditions than many other agricultural areas because it produces so many specialty commodities. Each commodity has its own outlook which goes through cycles. Therefore, for some the outlook and profits are bright, while others are being phased out. For example, while all growers were adversely affected by high interest rates and fluctuating dollars seen during the 1980s, flower growers felt severe competition from cheap blooms imported from South America. A short crop of avocados has brought prices back to some of the highest ever experienced. Low rainfall reduced rangeland forage so that incomes were reduced in spite of rising national beef prices.

Given the importance of agriculture to our local economy and the need to provide for its economic viability and stability, the Agricultural Element can serve as a useful tool for the County to:

- assist farmers to continue farming,
- be supportive of a stable agricultural economy,
- protect natural resources and the environment,
- provide for orderly planning in the County.

Agricultural Element

Implementation Measures

(81-GP-3, 86-0A-21 & 22)

(88-FEIR-17)

1. Recreational Trails

   It is recommended that the Recreation portion of the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan be updated. As part of that update, a trails acquisition program should be prepared. This program should determine the priority of the trails in the County based on the need for access into the Los Padres National Forest. The program should include acquisition options and a possible schedule for acquisition and ultimate opening of the trail. Impacts on the agricultural lands would be analyzed in the course of preparing this program, and mitigation measures would be recommended. Where trails would necessarily cross productive agricultural lands, mitigating measures would be required to void conflicts.

2. Water Conservation

   1) The County shall attempt to work with the Resource Conservation Districts (RCD's) and appropriate water districts in the developing water conservation plans. The County should, in concert with the RCD's, request that the Soil Conservation Service conduct a study to determine effective measures. Such plans should include water use evaluation programs and other specific measures for achieving irrigation efficiency.
   2) The County shall encourage voluntary and appropriate water conservation activities and provide for financial and technical incentives for agricultural water conservation.

3. Grading and Brush Clearing

   Implement the County Grading Ordinance including the amendments adopted by the Board of Supervisors on August 13, 1991 and amend the County Brush-clearing Ordinance in a manner consistent with the intent of the FEIR Mitigation Measure (identified as M-9).

4. Controlled burns and other non burning methods of fire risk reduction

It is suggested that the County take the lead in requesting the range Improvement Associations, in concert with the Soil Conservation Service, Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Commissioner, Fire Department, State Department of Fish and Game, and U.S. Forest Service to work together to (1) identify the additional information that is needed concerning beneficial and adverse effects of prescribed and controlled burns and alternative non-burning methods for fire hazard reduction on biological recourses for the County, (2) determine the most cost-effective way of obtaining such information, (3) designate a lead agency in the County for collecting and processing the information, and (4) recommend guidelines for prescribed and controlled burns and alternative non-burning methods for accomplishing fire reduction that would minimize adverse impacts on the long term protection of botanical and biological resources, increase water yields, protect and/or improve wildlife habitat, provide wildlife protection, and increase agricultural productivity. To assure that adverse impacts on biological resources are minimized, a professional plant ecologist shall also be included on the team.

5. Areas for Agricultural Support Use

The County needs to work with the Cities of Santa Maria, Guadalupe, Lompoc, and Carpinteria to identify areas for future agricultural support and industry. In some cases, it may be necessary to consider extension of existing urban boundaries and annexation of unincorporated lands for this purpose; in other cases unincorporated areas adjacent to urban boundaries might be appropriate for designation as agricultural industry. In identification of sufficient land areas for agricultural support and agricultural industry a necessary and specific part of the update of the Land Use Element for each planning area of the County. These updates should include an analysis of possibly redesignating existing vacant lands now designation for commercial or industrial use for agricultural support services.

6. Minimum parcel sizes

The County shall re-evaluate the existing 100-acre minimum parcel size for grazing and other non-prime lands by considering standards including but not limited to, the substitution of existing minimum parcel sizes with a performance or carrying capacity method of establishing appropriate minimum acreage requirements. At the same time, the County should conduct additional studies to evaluate alternatives for allowing these non-prime lands to realize some portion of their non-agricultural value.[3]

CITATIONS

[1] Resolution No. 91-537 (Case No. 81-GP-3) Amended September 3, 1991 (Adopting Resolution of Agricultural Element).

[2] For a complete listing of all Land Use Definitions, including all nonagricultural definitions, see Land Use Element text.

[3] Resolution No. 91-542 (Case No. 81-GP-3) (88-FEIR-17) Amended September 3, 1991 (Adopted Agricultural Element Implementation Measures 1 through 6; the Implementation Measures are contained within the County Board of Supervisor certified Agricultural Element Final Environmental Impact Report 88-FEIR-17 for the purpose of substantially lessening potential significant impacts or reducing impacts to a level of insignificance.)