

2. AGRICULTURE ELEMENT



Farming and related agricultural industries are not only the backbone of Colusa County’s economy, they also play a central role in the way of life of County residents and help define the character of the County. Throughout the development of the Colusa County 2030 General Plan, County residents, stakeholders, business leaders and elected officials identified the protection of agricultural lands and the expansion of agricultural opportunities as some of the most critical issues to be addressed in the General Plan.

This Agriculture Element contains goals, objectives, policies and action items geared towards the protection of agricultural lands, the expansion of agricultural operations, and the reduction of conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses. Background information related to this Element is contained in the Colusa County General Plan Background Report. The Agriculture Element is an optional Element of the General Plan.

Goal AG-1: Preserve and protect agricultural land.

Objective AG 1-A: *Recognize that Agricultural Land is the County's Greatest Natural Asset and Take Appropriate Measures to Restrict the Conversion of Agricultural Lands to Non-Agricultural Uses*

Policy AG 1-1: The following General Plan land use designations are considered agricultural lands: Agricultural General (AG), Agricultural Upland (AU), and Agricultural Transition (AT).

Agricultural lands account for over 75% of the entire County's area.

Policy AG 1-2: Lands designated for agricultural uses shall remain designated for agriculture and not be rezoned or redesignated to an urban use unless the following criteria are met:

- a. The lot(s) for which conversion is requested is adjacent to agriculture or agricultural support uses (e.g. receiving plants, hulling plants, warehousing, trucking, distribution, and other related activities.) on no more than two sides of the lot(s) or less than 50 percent of the perimeter of the lot(s) proposed for conversion.
- b. The conversion will not be detrimental to existing agricultural operations.
- c. The conversion land is within 500 feet of existing urban infrastructure (e.g., water supply lines and sewer lines) and conversion will constitute a logical contiguous extension of a designated urban area.
- d. The lot(s) proposed for conversion include a buffer at the agricultural/urban transition zone to protect future users of the conversion lands from nuisances associated with typical agricultural practices.
- e. No feasible alternative location (e.g., non-agricultural lands or less productive agricultural lands) exists.
- f. The use would not have a significant adverse effect on existing or potential agricultural activities on surrounding agricultural lands.

Policy AG 1-3: Land divisions that separate a farmer's home or an agricultural processing facility from the agricultural land shall be prohibited, unless the lot split meets the minimum lot size requirement of the zoning district.

Policy AG 1-4: Maintain agricultural parcel sizes that are large enough to sustain agricultural activities. The following minimum lot sizes shall apply to agricultural lands: Agricultural General- 40 acres, Agricultural Upland- 80 acres, and Agricultural Transition - 10 acres.

Policy AG 1-5: Encourage lot mergers to meet minimum parcel size standards.

Policy AG 1-6: Residential development on agricultural lands shall be limited to housing for family members and agricultural employee housing.

**Agricultural employee housing is further addressed in the Housing Element.*

Policy AG 1-7: Work with the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) on issues of mutual concern including the conservation of agricultural land through consistent use of LAFCO policies, particularly those related to conversion of agricultural lands and establishment of adequate buffers between agricultural and non-agricultural uses, and the designation of reasonable and logical Sphere of Influence (SOI) boundaries for cities and service districts.

Policy AG 1-8: Protect agricultural lands from urban encroachment by limiting the extension of urban service facilities and infrastructure, particularly public water and sewer.

Policy AG 1-9: Encourage the conservation of agricultural lands using available programs that provide benefit to the County and/or farmers.

Action AG 1-A: Monitor the conversion of agricultural lands (AG, AU, and AT) located outside of urban and urban reserve areas to non-agricultural uses. If agricultural land conversion rates increase significantly, the Board of Supervisors shall consider the adoption of a farmland conversion mitigation program. If a farmland conversion mitigation program is developed, the development of agriculture-supporting uses should be exempt from mitigation and all mitigation fees should be used to preserve farmland within Colusa County.

Action AG 1-B: Revise and update the County’s Zoning Ordinance to specify the number of dwelling units that may be constructed per full-time and part-time farm operation and to permit farmworker housing units consistent with the requirements of Health and Safety Code Section 1267.8. Family member and agricultural employee residences should be located in the same immediate vicinity as the existing residence, if this is practical and environmentally sound. Family member residences accessory to full-time operations should not be located on separate legal lots created for this purpose unless the divided lots meet minimum lot size requirements. The new regulations should also emphasize locating housing in areas that best protect farming practices and minimize impacts on residents.

Action AG 1-C: Revise the Zoning Ordinance to create a zoning district (Agricultural Transition) that is compatible with the Agricultural Transition land use designation. The classification shall provide for a minimum lot size of 10 acres and shall allow agricultural uses, including small-scale farms, visitor-serving uses oriented to the agricultural industry, farmers markets, and small-scale commercial uses oriented to the agricultural industry.

Objective AG 1-B: *Reduce Conflicts between Agricultural and Urban Uses and Between Habitat Conservation Areas and Agricultural Uses*

Policy AG 1-10: Maintain clearly designated locations for future growth around existing communities through application of the Urban Reserve Area (URA).

Policy AG 1-11: Require the use of buffers such as greenbelts, drainage features, parks or other improved and maintained features, to separate residential and other sensitive land uses, such as schools and hospitals, from agricultural lands and agricultural operations. Lands designated Agricultural Transition are considered an appropriate buffer between urban or sensitive land uses and agricultural lands designated Agricultural General and Agricultural Upland.

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Policy AG 1-12: Agricultural uses shall continue to be protected through on-going adherence to and implementation of the County's right to farm ordinance (Colusa County Code Chapter 34, Farming Practices).

Policy AG 1-13: Urban development shall not adversely impact the financial sustainability of agricultural operations.

Policy AG 1-14: Resource conservation activities such as habitat creation and active habitat or species management on lands designated for agricultural uses shall require a General Plan Amendment to Resource Conservation unless the following conditions are met:

- a. The resource conservation activities involve active and on-going agricultural activities on the majority of the site.
- b. The resource conservation activities are compatible with agricultural activities on the site and existing or potential agricultural activities in the vicinity.
- c. There would not be a concentration of resource conservation lands in the immediate area.

If the above conditions are met, the resource conservation activities shall require a Conditional Use Permit.

Policy AG 1-15: Habitat management without active and ongoing agricultural activities is not considered an agricultural use, and shall require a General Plan Amendment to designate such lands Resource Conservation (RC).

Action AG 1-D: Amend the Zoning Ordinance to include specific agricultural buffer requirements for residential and sensitive land uses (such as schools, day care facilities, and medical facilities) that are proposed within 500 feet of agricultural lands in order to protect existing agricultural operations from encroachment by incompatible uses. Buffers shall generally be defined as a physical separation of 100 to 200 feet and/or may be, or include, a topographic feature, roadway, bike/pedestrian path, a substantial tree stand, a maintained greenbelt, water course, or similar feature. In some circumstances a landscaped berm may provide the buffer. The buffer shall occur on the parcel for which a permit is sought and shall favor protection of the maximum amount of agricultural land.

Action AG 1-E: Amend the Zoning Ordinance to:

- 1. Identify habitat management activities allowed on lands designated for agricultural use. Allowable habitat management activities may include the preservation of foraging habitat for species on lands that are actively farmed. Such habitat management activities shall not preclude ongoing viable farming of the land.*
- 2. Create specific standards to be included in Conditional Use Permits issued for habitat management plans and resource conservation activities adjacent to agricultural operations in order to ensure that agricultural operations are not adversely impacted. Such measures may include:*

- *Setbacks;*
- *Active pest management;*
- *Barrier fencing; and*
- *Other measures deemed appropriate by the County.*

Goal AG-2: Maintain and enhance agriculture as the County’s most critical land use, economic sector, and resource.

Objective AG 2-A: Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Increased Agricultural Production by Allowing Agricultural Processing Facilities and Uses Directly Supporting Agriculture in All Agricultural Land Use Categories

Policy AG 2-1: Agricultural-related industrial support operations shall be permitted on agricultural lands. Such uses may include, but are not limited to, processing, assembly, distribution and warehousing of agricultural materials and commodities and alternative energy systems that provide energy for on-site uses. These uses should be permitted on agricultural lands as principal permitted uses subject to the standards of the Zoning Ordinance provided the following findings are made:

- a. The use provides a needed service to the surrounding agricultural area which cannot be provided more efficiently within designated industrial or commercial areas or which requires location in a non-urban area because of unusual site requirements, operational characteristics, or proximity to agricultural goods and products.
- b. The use avoids prime agricultural lands to the greatest extent feasible.
- c. If the use is sited on productive agricultural lands, less productive agricultural lands are not available in the vicinity.
- d. The operational or physical characteristics of the use will not have a significant adverse impact on water resources or the use or management of surrounding agricultural properties within at least a one-quarter (1/4) mile radius.
- e. The use supports local agricultural production.
- f. The use is compatible with existing uses in the area.
- g. The use will not adversely affect agricultural production in the area.
- h. The use will not result in significant adverse traffic or air quality impacts.
- i. The use will not be detrimental to the rural character of the area.

Industries that support farming and agricultural operations are vital in supporting the County’s farms and economy.

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Action AG 2-A: Revise the Zoning Ordinance to allow agricultural support facilities as a principal permitted use on lands designated for agricultural use. The revision to the zoning ordinance shall establish definitions and standards in the Zoning Ordinance that differentiate between facilities that support agricultural uses, such as those directly necessary for processing, packaging, distribution, and on-site energy production, and those facilities that are industrial or commercial in nature and do not directly support agricultural activities and are not appropriate for development, without a Conditional Use Permit, in an agricultural zoning classification. The revisions shall identify performance standards that agricultural support facilities permit requests shall comply with, including:

- a. Hours of operation*
- b. Maximum noise levels*
- c. Maximum daily trips*
- d. Setbacks*
- e. Lighting*
- f. Water and sewer demand*
- g. Flood management*
- h. Landscaping*
- i. Drainage infrastructure*
- j. Roadway and access improvements*
- k. Fire protection*

Objective AG 2-B: *Allow Limited Recreation and Resource Production Uses on Agricultural Lands While Ensuring that Such Uses Do Not Adversely Affect Agricultural Activities*

Policy AG 2-2: Visitor-serving uses that support and are incidental to agricultural production, such as tasting rooms, including sales and promotion of products grown or processed in the County, educational activities and tours, incidental sales of items related to local area agricultural products, promotional events, and farm homestays, which allow visitors to visit a farm in the form of a vacation, that support and are secondary and incidental to local agricultural production, shall be allowed on agricultural lands provided the following findings are made:

- a. The use promotes and markets only agricultural products 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 sewer and water service.

- d. The use is compatible with existing uses in the area.
- e. The use will not adversely affect agricultural production in the area.
- f. The use will not result in significant adverse traffic or air quality impacts.
- g. The use will not be detrimental to the rural character of the area.

Policy AG 2-3: Low-intensity recreational uses may be permitted on agricultural lands as long as they do not interfere with the principal use of the land for agricultural purposes. Examples include hunting, fishing, target shooting, horseback riding, hiking and exhibitions of working farms or ranches.

Policy AG 2-4: The exploration and extraction of oil, gas and other mineral resources may be allowed on agricultural lands, provided the activity is conducted in a way that minimizes interference with agricultural operations and does not result in a permanent loss of the agricultural viability of the land.

Policy AG 2-5: Encourage and support the development of new agricultural related industries featuring alternative energy, utilization of agricultural waste, biofuels, and solar or wind farms.

Action AG 2-B: Revise the Zoning Ordinance to allow visitor-serving uses that support and are incidental to agricultural production as a principal permitted use on lands designated for agricultural use. The revision to the Zoning Ordinance shall establish definitions and standards in the Zoning Ordinance that differentiate between visitor-serving uses that support and are incidental to agricultural production, and those visitor-serving uses that do not directly support agricultural activities and are not appropriate for development, without a Conditional Use Permit, in an agricultural zoning classification. The revisions shall identify performance standards that agricultural support facilities permit requests shall comply with, including, but not limited to:

- a. Hours of operation*
- b. Maximum noise levels*
- c. Maximum daily trips*
- d. Setbacks*
- e. Lighting*
- f. Water and sewer demand*
- g. Flood management*
- h. Landscaping*
- i. Drainage infrastructure*
- j. Roadway and access improvements*
- k. Fire protection*

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Action AG 2-C: Revise the Zoning Ordinance to identify recreational activities permitted on agricultural lands and to develop performance standards for such uses. These performance standards shall address environmental impact mitigation and compatibility with surrounding land uses, including but not limited to:

- a. Hours of operation*
- b. Maximum noise levels*
- c. Maximum daily trips*
- d. Setbacks*
- e. Lighting*
- f. Water and sewer demand*
- g. Flood management*
- h. Landscaping*
- i. Drainage infrastructure*
- j. Roadway and access improvements*
- k. Fire protection*

Action AG 2-D: Revise the Zoning Ordinance to define alternative energy and to develop performance standards for energy-generating and resource extraction uses on agricultural lands. These performance standards shall address environmental impact mitigation and compatibility with surrounding land uses, including but not limited to:

- a. Hours of operation*
- b. Maximum noise levels*
- c. Maximum daily trips*
- d. Setbacks*
- e. Lighting*
- f. Water and sewer demand*
- g. Flood management*
- h. Landscaping*
- i. Drainage infrastructure*
- j. Roadway and access improvements*
- k. Fire protection*

Action AG 2-E: Establish procedures and standards in the Zoning Ordinance to identify agricultural uses and activities which may be approved by administrative action and to expedite the processing of permits for agricultural and agriculture related uses.

Objective AG 2-C: *Preserve and Protect Water, Soil, and Natural Resources Necessary for Agricultural Operations*

Policy AG 2-6: Where existing agricultural and proposed urban uses are competing for the same water supply, priority should be given to agricultural uses.

Policy AG 2-7: Work with agricultural land owners to improve practices that have resulted in adverse impacts to adjacent properties. Such practices include site drainage and flood control measures and the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs).

Policy AG 2-8: Support and promote water development projects which provide additional sources of water for agricultural uses.

Policy AG 2-9: Support the procurement of expanded and additional water rights which provide for contractual supply reliability for agricultural use.

Policy AG 2-10: Seek to increase the County’s influence regarding water rights and distribution legislation at the state and federal level, to the greatest degree feasible for both surface water and ground water sources. This may occur through County support for local farm interest groups seeking to influence water-related legislation at the state and federal levels.

Policy AG 2-11: Assist farmers in resolving water rights, water delivery, and water supply issues with other agencies such as the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and the California Department of Water Resources.

Policy AG 2-12: Within conservation easements and habitat conservation lands, preclude the practice of fallowing fields for the purpose of water export.

Policy AG 2-13: Encourage the reuse of treated wastewater for agricultural purposes.

Policy AG 2-14: Preserve water resources for agriculture, both in quantity and quality, from competition with development, non-agricultural uses, mitigation banks, and/or interests from outside of the County.

Policy AG 2-15: Promote best management practices in agricultural operations (including animal operations) to reduce emissions, conserve energy and water, and utilize alternative energy sources.

Policy AG 2-16: Promote wildlife-friendly farm practices, such as tailwater ponds, native species/grasslands restoration in field margins, hedgerows, ditch management for riparian habitat, restoration of riparian areas in a manner consistent with ongoing water delivery systems, reduction of pesticides, and other appropriate measures.

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Action AG 2-F: Coordinate with irrigation districts to identify cost-effective and feasible Best Management Practices for the application and use of water resources that address the range of agricultural activities in Colusa County. Work with entities such as the irrigation districts, Agricultural Commissioner, and UC Extension Office to distribute Best Management Practices information to agricultural operations in the County.

Action AG 2-G: Collaborate with water suppliers and wastewater treatment plant operators to increase the availability of treated or recycled water for agricultural purposes.