3.0 AGRICULTURAL ISSUES

This Chapter provides an overview and summary of issues affecting agriculture in Yolo County, as identified during preparation of the Agricultural Element. For additional information, please refer to the Agricultural Element Background Report.

3.1 Long-Term Regional Growth Pressures: Attitudes and Trends

Yolo County shares boundaries with the counties of Colusa, Lake, Napa, Solano, Sutter and Sacramento. The boundary with Lake County is very small, and that General Plan is not addressed here. The General Plans for the other respective counties have been reviewed to identify land use designations and agricultural policies that may affect Yolo County, as described below. In addition, the *Land Use and Resource Management Plan for the Primary Zone of the Delta*, as administered by the Delta Protection Commission, is also described.

Colusa County General Plan

The portions of Colusa County that abut Yolo County are designated for Agriculture-General, Agriculture-Upland, and Resource Conservation on the *Colusa County General Plan* Generalized Land Use Plan. One small area along I-5 at the county boundary is designated Industrial. The policies of the General Plan are designed to protect the integrity of agriculture, to give priority to agriculture for water supply, to limit industrial development in agricultural areas to agricultural industries, to promote use of the Williamson Act, and to establish agriculture and resource management as the primary land uses outside designated communities.

Napa County General Plan

The *Napa County General Plan* focuses on agricultural preservation. As stated on the first page of the Plan, a summary of the general goals contained in the Plan can be described as a statement of intent to preserve agriculture, and concentrate urban uses in existing urban areas. It also states that the essence of the *Napa County General Plan* is to:

> …ensure the long term protection and integrity of those areas identified in the General Plan as agricultural, open space or undevelopable…(as well as to) stimulate the development of those areas identified in the General Plan for residential, commercial and industrial (uses).

The Land Use Element includes a discussion of agricultural issues which states that in 1968, increasing urbanization pressures, an awareness of the County's agricultural potential and a concern for the future of that agriculture led citizens' groups, growers and vintners, the County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors to establish one of the first Agricultural Preserves in the nation. Public support for the Agricultural Preserve and the size of the Preserve itself have increased since that time. The Preserve now contains over 29,000 acres.

In 1990, the voters of Napa County approved Measure J, the Agricultural Lands Preservation Initiative. This initiative precluded changes in the General Plan that would affect lands

designated "Agriculture, Watershed and Open Space" or "Agricultural Resource" until the year 2020, unless a change was approved by a vote of the people. The same procedure was also applied to changes in minimum parcel size and building intensity within the affected designations. The only exceptions to voter approval include annexations to cities; circumstances where the Board of Supervisors makes all of several restrictive findings pertaining to location, use and size of the parcel; and where the Board finds that a constitutional taking may otherwise occur.

The entire area bordering Yolo County is designated "Agriculture, Watershed & Open Space" on the Napa County Land Use Plan (Map).

Solano County General Plan

The *Solano County General Plan* includes policies designed to preserve and maintain essential agricultural lands, to establish large minimum parcel sizes in essential agricultural areas, to confine urban development to patterns which do not conflict with essential agricultural lands, and to retain non-essential agricultural lands in agricultural use until conversion is determined to be necessary. Essential agricultural lands are defined as those productive farmlands which have been identified by the local community as necessary to the maintenance of a healthy agricultural economy. Criteria for redesignation of agricultural lands are included in the General Plan.

In 1992, Solano County and the cities of Benicia, Fairfield and Vallejo executed a Joint Powers Agreement to preserve 10,000 acres of open space between the three cities (most of which is in the County's Extensive Agriculture zone). Proposed conversions of land within this area must be approved by representatives of the three cities and the county, known as the Tri-Cities and County Regional Park and Open Space Authority. The Authority's preservation plan also involves the use of transfer of development rights, purchase of agricultural conservation easements, clustering, Williamson Act contracts and private land protection initiatives in this area (American Farmland Trust, Saving American Farmland: What Works, 1997).

Although not part of the *Solano County General Plan*, the cities of Vacaville and Dixon established the Vacaville-Dixon Greenbelt Authority in 1995. The purpose of this greenbelt, which encompasses 926 acres, is to guarantee that the land will remain as an agricultural buffer in perpetuity. This was accomplished through acquisition from willing sellers and resale of the properties with a permanent conservation easement. A joint powers agreement administered by two council members appointed by each city ensures the preservation of the land. Numerous awards have recognized this achievement.

Sutter County General Plan

The *Sutter County General Plan* includes policies that require that new development adjacent to agricultural areas be designed to minimize conflicts with adjacent agricultural uses, to protect agricultural operations from conflicts with non-agricultural uses by requiring buffers between proposed nonagricultural uses and existing agricultural operations, and to continue to implement the County's Right to Farm Ordinance. The areas that abut the Yolo County boundary are designated Agriculture (AG) 20 acre minimum parcel size, Open Space, and at the southern end

of Sutter County 10,500 acres is designated Industrial/Commercial Reserve. The County is currently in the process of preparing a specific plan for 3,500 acres of the 10,500-acre Reserve. During the year 2000, Sutter County implemented the Williamson Act for the first time.

Sacramento County General Plan

The *Land Use Element* of the *County of Sacramento General Plan* establishes Urban Service Boundaries, and limits expansion of urban uses in rural areas to the established Delta communities of Freeport, Hood, Courtland, Locke and Walnut Grove. The General Plan limits agricultural-residential land use expansion outside the Urban Service Boundary which does not compromise objectives for protecting prime agricultural lands and open space. The General Plan also includes an objective to protect important farmlands to ensure the continuation of agricultural production and preserve open space. Areas that abut the Yolo County Boundary are designated Public-Quasi Public (Sacramento International Airport), Agricultural Cropland, and Natural Preserve (along the Sacramento River). The *Agricultural Element* of the General Plan includes, as a goal, the protection of important farmlands from conversion and encroachment and conservation of agricultural resources. The Element provides for buffers to separate farming practices incompatible with adjacent urban uses, to limit applications for General Plan amendments redesignating prime farmland to agricultural/residential or urban uses, and to mitigate loss of prime farmlands through CEQA requirements to provide in-kind protection of nearby farmland. The Element also establishes minimum parcel size for agricultural land use designations.

Delta Protection Commission

Portions of Yolo County fall within the jurisdiction of the Delta Protection Commission, which is a regional land use planning agency with planning and limited regulatory authority over the Primary Zone of the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta. The Primary Zone includes land and water area of primary state concern and statewide significance located within the boundaries of the Delta and not within the urban limit line or sphere of influence of any local government. The remaining land and water area within the Delta makes up the Secondary Zone. Figure "X" of the Appendix depicts the Delta Protection Commission's boundaries for the Primary and Secondary zones in and around Yolo County.

For lands within the Delta, the County must ensure that its General Plan is consistent with Commission's *Land use and Resource Management Plan*. The County has integrated the Commission's Plan into its General Plan through previous adoption of the following policy:

> The *Land Use and Resource Management Plan* for the Primary Zone of the Delta adopted by the Delta Protection Commission is incorporated herein by this reference and shall apply in those areas designated with such Plan.

The Delta Protection Commission maintains a number of policies concerning agriculture within the Primary Zone of the Delta with a focus on support and protection of commercial agriculture while minimizing damage to wildlife habitat and water resources. The Commission has recently

appointed an Agriculture Committee and is currently considering actions to update its agricultural policies.

3.2 Expanding Urban Areas Around Cities: Overview of City Attitudes and Policies Toward Agriculture

Davis

The City of Davis was incorporated in 1917. Since that time Davis has grown to a current population of approximately 63,300 (2002, State Department of Finance). The City reports a total of 23,249 housing units in 2001. Much of the City's past growth can be attributed to the growing student enrollment at U.C. Davis. In the 1950s, Davis' average growth was among the highest in the Sacramento region. In 1986, voters in the City of Davis approved an advisory measure for the City "to grow as slowly as legally possible." According to SACOG, population for the City of Davis is estimated to increase to 65,615 by 2010, 68,740 by 2020 and 70,300 by 2025. The *City of Davis General Plan* includes a policy to establish a "Planned Urbanized Edge" which is to be defined by an open space, hedgerow, agricultural ring or buffer.

Figure 4-1 of the Appendix shows the 10-year and 20-year Spheres of Influence for the City of Davis. As revealed in the figure, most of City's future expansion will be in the southwestern portion of the city (U.C. Davis ownership), and to a lesser extent in the northern section.

The annual growth rate in the City of Davis from 1988 through 1999 was 28 percent higher than anticipated. The unexpected growth rate placed a significant burden on public infrastructure and educational facilities. To prevent urban encroachment into agricultural lands and regulate the population growth rate, the City of Davis adopted Measure J (Ordinance No. 2008). The Ordinance amends the General Plan to add a policy requiring voter approval for certain changes to General Plan land use designations, or approval of entitlements on certain properties designated for urban use.

Measure J requires voter approval for the following types of General Plan amendments: (1) to change an agricultural or urban reserve designation to an urban designation; (2) to change an agricultural designation to an urban reserve designation. Voter approval is also required for any proposal for development on the Covell Center and Nishi properties, the last two large undeveloped properties designated for urban use.

On November 7, 2000, Davis voters approved Measure O, a parcel tax that will generate an estimated $17.5 million over 30 years to fund open space purchases within a planning area of over 102,000 acres surrounding the city. Supporters of the measure have indicated that purchases will be targeted in areas around sloughs and parcels within a 4,300-acre urban-agricultural transition area adjacent to the city limits.

Other measures contained in the City of Davis General Plan and Municipal Code that are designed to protect the agricultural lands surrounding the City include the establishment of an

agricultural transition area land use category and agricultural transition area for new developments as described in Section 3.13, Agricultural Buffers.

Agricultural protection is also provided by the Right to Farm and Farmland Preservation Ordinance. The right to farm portion of the ordinance is intended to reduce the loss of agricultural resources by limiting the circumstances under which agricultural operations may be deemed a nuisance. The farmland preservation portion of the ordinance implements a program designed to protect agricultural land located within the planning area for agricultural uses. The City requires one to one mitigation for any discretionary development entitlement that will change the use of agricultural land to nonagricultural use. Mitigation may be accomplished through the granting of, or payment for, a farmland easement, deed restriction, or other conservation mechanism. The required 150-foot agricultural transition area buffer is not included in the mitigation calculation. The mitigation land must be located within the Davis planning area, compatible with the Davis General Plan, free of easements or physical constraints that would not allow for agricultural use, comparable in soil quality and have an adequate water supply. The General Plan includes an action item to strengthen the Farmland Preservation Ordinance by seeking a minimum of two to one mitigation for new peripheral development projects.

West Sacramento

In 1987, the City of West Sacramento was incorporated, making it the newest city in Yolo County. The current population is 31,615 (2000 U.S. Census), and the City's General Plan is designed to link the rate of growth to the provision of adequate services and infrastructure. This rapid increase in population is partly due to the City's goals for redevelopment and revitalization as stated in their 1999 Draft General Plan. Included in the General Plan is a policy that limits total population in the Southport area to 40,000 residents by 2010. The City's General Plan also includes a policy that gives preference to development adjacent to the city or which has convenient freeway access, to minimize disruption of agricultural land.

The City's Sphere of Influence is coterminous with the city limits, which include substantial undeveloped land. This boundary is shown in Figure 4-2 of the Appendix. The most recent survey of land within the corporate limits of West Sacramento, conducted in 1994, showed that there were 6,599 acres of undeveloped land (approximately 10 square miles). The General Plan provides for a Sphere of Influence that includes the area south to Babel Slough, west to the western toe of the eastern Yolo By-Pass levee, and north to Monument Bend.

Winters

The City of Winters has a current population of 6,125 (2000 U.S. Census), and the City's General Plan is designed to accommodate a population of 12,500 by 2010. Figure 4-3 of the Appendix shows the City's 10-year and 20-year Sphere of Influence lines. According to the City's proposed Sphere of Influence, it appears that future expansion will be primarily to the north and northeast, although the General Plan includes a policy to study an area adjacent to and northwest of the City's Urban Limit Line for future annexation and development. The City of Winters currently has two large development applications pending which would involve

annexations: the *Greyhawk Specific Plan*, which includes a 210-acre annexation, and the Springfield Ranch project, which could involve annexation of approximately 845 acres.

Woodland

The City of Woodland, once known as Yolo City and later renamed, became the Yolo County seat in 1862. The City has a current population of 49,151 (2000 U.S. Census), and the City's General Plan is designed to accommodate a population of 66,000 by 2020. Figure 4-4 shows the City's Spheres of Influence for 2010 and 2020. According to the City's General Plan, prime agricultural soils are located to the north, west and south of the City. The General Plan maintains the Urban Limit Line boundary on the west at County Road 98 and on the northwest about one half mile north of Kentucky Avenue, but allows for some urban development on agricultural lands on the south since there are constraints to growth to the north, west and east. The figure shows that the 2020 Sphere of Influence includes expansion areas in the northwestern and southeastern portions of the city. The City of Woodland currently has a large development application pending, known as the *Turn of the Century Specific Plan*, which could add approximately 1,200 acres to the City of Woodland.

Interjurisdictional Agreements

Yolo County has executed agreements with the four incorporated cities which address development in the unincorporated area within the cities' Spheres of Influence. These understandings are included in agreements with the respective cities' redevelopment agencies regarding redevelopment projects in the cities or in the County-adopted General Plans for the cities. Highlights of these agreements and their date of original execution are provided below:

City of Davis (1987). The County must consult with the City regarding requests for conditional uses within the City Planning Area, and regarding certain requests for permitted uses within that area. The "City Planning Area" is defined as the area within the City's General Plan Planning Area Boundary but outside of the City. If the County approves urban development within the City Planning Area during the term of the agreement, the Redevelopment Agency may terminate its obligation to make future "pass through" tax increment payments to the County. The agreement also provides that in implementation of its General Plan, the City shall approve sufficient new development which results in an average annual rate of population growth within the city of at least 1.78 percent through 2011.

City of Woodland (1980). The *Woodland Area General Plan* includes an "Urban Development Policy" regarding development of the unincorporated area. Urban development in the area between the urban limit line and outer boundaries of the *Woodland Area General Plan* area is prohibited, with the exception of specified types of development which are consistent with the General Plan. Urban development in unincorporated territory within the urban limit line is prohibited, with specific exceptions for agricultural uses, single-family dwellings on existing parcels, and expansions of existing non-residential uses if certain findings are made.

City of West Sacramento (1990). Certain amendments to the County General Plan within the City's Planning Area must be presented to the City for review prior to adoption by the County.

The "Planning Area" is defined as the unincorporated area located north of the city generally bounded by the Sacramento Northern Railroad and I-5 to the north, the Sacramento River to the east, the east levee of the Yolo Bypass to the west, and the unincorporated area located south of the city generally bounded by Babel Slough to the south, the Sacramento River to the east, and the east levee of the Yolo Bypass to the west. If the County approves a General Plan Amendment which has not been approved by the City, the Redevelopment Agency may terminate its obligation to make "pass through" tax increment payments to the County for the next five years. Urban development approved by the County in the Planning Area must comply with City standards for urban infrastructure.

City of Winters (1992). The Redevelopment Agency's obligation to pass through a share of the tax increments shall cease if the County approves a use on certain parcels other than a use allowed under the County's Agricultural General Plan designation or the A-1 or A-P zones.

The Agricultural Element provides for the continued conservation and preservation of agricultural lands in Yolo County outside existing planned communities and city limits.

3.3 Recreation and Agricultural Compatibility

In its broadest sense, sustainable tourism is people enjoying a natural outdoors that is managed to be ecologically sustainable.

According to the *Yolo County Agricultural and Tourism Targeted Industry Analyses*:

> Agri-tourism is an even more recent phenomena [than eco-tourism] which is built on a strong family focus. Entrepreneurial growers and ranchers have opened their farms for day visits, overnight stays and week-long "working" vacations with foods prepared from seasonally available produce and cooked in the kitchens of host farms. Roadside fruit and vegetable stands, farmers markets and you-pick-em gardens are all part of the movement which began among organic growers to come into direct contact with the ultimate consumers of their produce.

The report points out that, while agri-tourism can bring outside revenues into the county, it is not labor-intensive and therefore does not generate significant additional employment. The report also notes that farm operators may be reluctant to increase traffic through areas where they live and work. The report presents the following "keys" to developing agri-tourism in Yolo County:

- Involving Organic Farmers: Organic farmers are motivated to market their produce directly to the public. Agri-tourism extends their opportunities to do this by bringing additional consumers to the farm rather than forcing farmers to seek out consumers. If this is successful, it will generate new revenues from tourists paying to visit or stay on farms while increasing sales of produce. Additionally, using Napa and Sonoma Valley wineries as examples, some of these farms can establish small restaurants featuring foods prepared from the fresh produce grown on the farm. Again, a significant, sustained promotional effort is needed to realize the full potential of this concept.

- Involving UC Davis: The University of California Davis is one of the nation's most important agricultural learning and research institutions. Involving it in agri-tourism activities would create significant additional employment and revenue-generating opportunities because of the reach and depth of its programs and reputation. Visits to the campus could be merged and coordinated with on-farm visits, educational workshops and classes to demonstrate new techniques and technologies. Given the positive relationship that exists between the University and the county, it would seem possible to coordinate a continuing cross-promotional campaign to the benefit of both entities.

An article in the Sacramento Bee ("Seeds of Change: Agritourism Grows as Farms Try to Boost Their Revenues," August 14, 2000) reports on agri-tourism in Yolo and other Sacramento Valley counties. The article featured the Yolo Land & Cattle Co. in Winters, at which visitors can observe and participate in some activities of a 7,500-acre working cattle ranch. "Impossible Acres," a pick-it-yourself farm outside the City of Davis, features peaches, plums and cherries, and a pumpkin patch in the fall. Certain activities that fall within the definition of agri-tourism require permits under the County's Zoning Ordinance. In the County's predominant agricultural zones, bed and breakfasts and lodges require approval of either a Minor Use Permit or a Major Use Permit, depending on the zone.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has also published a series of articles under the general heading "Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism" that is designed to help landowners and communities ensure that the natural resource base is protected while pursuing alternative and agritourism enterprises. As described by the NRCS:

> Alternative and agritourism enterprises allow farmers and ranchers to earn higher profits by replacing or supplementing traditional farm operations with innovative on-farm or on-ranch ventures.
>
> Alternative enterprises can take many forms. They can produce food and fiber or have little to do with agriculture. They can produce new or unique crops or livestock or add value to traditional agricultural products. They can produce fun, recreation, and nature-based, or educational products. They can rely on traditional farm practices or use alternative methods, such as organic systems. They can be labor and resource intensive or require few inputs. They can operate seasonally, or year-round.
>
> But they all have a common theme: farmers and ranchers rely on the natural resources on their land – the soil, water, air, plants, wildlife and scenery – to keep their family on the farm and the farm in their family. They also require sound land care. Since the land's resources generate income, conserving those resources makes good business sense.

Enterprises described by the NRCS include: Community Supported Agriculture (subscription farming, and cooperatives), Heritage Tourism (historic farm tours, reenactments, and other cultural events), Fee-Based Outdoor Recreation, Value-Added Products (goats, llamas, free range livestock, bison, elk, deer, aquaculture, bait, mushrooms, etc.) and Alternative Marketing

(pick/cut your own fruits vegetables and flowers, rent-a-tree, internet sales, farmers markets, roadside sales).

While Yolo County itself may not have the capacity to attract large numbers of visitors for extended stays, it does have the opportunity to attract regional visitors and those more localized. The greatest potential for Yolo County comes in pulling visitors from the surrounding regions. Within an approximate 90 minute driving time of Yolo County, the total population is approximately 6.9 million, some of which could potentially be attracted as day visitors. The three counties compared to Yolo County in the analysis above – Sacramento, Solano, and Napa - either share similar attractions or are in close enough proximity that visitors would take the time to experience Yolo County. Those visiting Napa for wine tasting may wish to visit Yolo County for the same thing, or those visiting Sacramento may wish to travel to Yolo County to experience wilderness hiking or white water rafting. Instead of promoting individual activities or attractions, it is recommended that Yolo County participate with local visitor-serving businesses and attractions in creating a countywide identity.

Another opportunity that Yolo County could explore would be something akin to a "farm trail" or other visitor serving activity in which visitors spend time moving between attractions with the same or similar theme. Currently the Putah-Cache Bioregion Project, based at UC Davis, promotes a circumdrive that traverses the Putah-Cache Creek watershed encompassing parts of Yolo and surrounding counties. In Fresno County, the Blossom Trail is touted as an auto/motorcycle/bicycle trail that highlights the region's agriculture and historical points of interest. In the community of Camino in Placer County, Apple Hill is a popular destination with numerous farms, orchards and wineries, which hosts events and maintains an organization to attract visitors. The almond festival in Esparto could be an incubator for a similar type of organization in Yolo County.

It is essential to protect commercial agricultural production from potential negative aspects of eco-tourism, recreation and agri-tourism, such as trespassing, vandalism, and unintentional spread of agricultural pests and disease. The Agricultural Element includes policies to ensure land use compatibility while providing opportunities for recreation, tourism and associated support services in appropriate locations.

3.4 Williamson Act Role

Yolo County currently has approximately 449,621 acres enrolled in the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act). According to the California Department of Conservation, 61,321 acres are classified as "Prime (within 3 miles of city limits)" and 173,494 acres are classified as "Prime (more than 3 miles from city limits)," for a total of 234,815 acres for which the County receives the maximum of $5 per acre subvention from the State of California. A total of 162,315 acres of non-prime lands are under contract, for which the County receives $1 per acre subvention. Other properties are in nonrenewal or are otherwise not subvented.

The Williamson Act is a non-mandated State program, administered by counties and cities, for the preservation of agricultural land. Participation in the program is voluntary on the part of both landowners and local governments, and is implemented through the establishment of

Agricultural Preserves and the execution of Williamson Act contracts. Individual property owners enter into a contract which restricts or prohibits development of their property to non-agricultural uses during the term of the contract in return for lower property taxes. Initially signed for a minimum ten-year period, the contracts are automatically renewed each year for a successive minimum ten-year period unless a notice of nonrenewal is filed or a contract cancellation is approved by the local government. Approximately 21,142 acres, or 5 percent of the acreage in preserves, are currently in the nonrenewal process countywide.

State subventions are paid to participating county and city governments, based on enrolled acreage, in partial repayment for foregone property tax revenues. These subventions typically do not fully reimburse the counties and cities for lost revenues. For this reason, some jurisdictions do not participate in the Williamson Act program, and others have stopped taking new applications. The current subvention rate is five dollars per acre for prime farmland and one dollar per acre for nonprime land. With the creation of the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF) property tax shift from counties to the State in 1993, the Department of Conservation reports that county governments actually come out ahead on lands within Williamson Act contracts. Although many variables are involved (e.g., the base year for property tax valuation for individual parcels), County officials generally concur with that conclusion (Bill Sbarra, Senior Appraiser, Yolo County Assessor's Office, pers. comm., November 2000).

State law requires that participating counties and cities adopt rules governing the administration of agricultural preserves and the types of uses allowed on land under contract. The uniform rules governing the types of uses allowed on lands under contract in Yolo County are contained in the A-P zoning regulations of the Yolo County Zoning Ordinance.

State law establishes procedures for cancellation of Williamson Act contracts and requires that all cancellations be carried out in accordance with those procedures. There is no local discretion. State law limits the termination of a Williamson Act contract through the cancellation process to "special" or "extraordinary" circumstances. In contrast to the nonrenewal process, in which a contract is phased out over a nine-year period, approval of a cancellation request results in the immediate termination of a contract once conditions are met. Only the property owner can apply for cancellation, and only the Board of Supervisors can approve such a request after holding a public hearing and making the finding that the cancellation would either be consistent with the intent of the Williamson Act or would be in the public interest. If a property owner receives approval of cancellation, payment of a penalty based on a percentage of the current market value of the land is required prior to termination of the contract. Yolo County has a history of not approving contract cancellations.

Although implementation of the Williamson Act program is voluntary, once contracts are executed, withdrawal from the program can only be undertaken in accordance with State law. The local entity may, however, impose more stringent requirements for cancellation than those specified under State law. Notices of nonrenewal can be filed either by the property owners or the local entity, after adequate notice has been given, as set forth in State law.

In 1998, the State Legislature amended the Williamson Act to provide for the establishment of "Farmland Security Zones." Since the passage of the Williamson Act, it became apparent that owners of prime farmland and land used for high value crops may not realize the property tax reductions under traditional Williamson Act contracts sufficient to justify restricting their land to agricultural purposes. The Farmland Security Zone legislation authorizes landowners to petition the Board of Supervisors to rescind their existing Williamson Act contract in favor of a new Farmland Security Zone Contract (FSZ contract). Land subject to a FSZ contract is valued for assessment purposes at 65 percent of the value of its Williamson Act value, or its Proposition 13 value, whichever is lower. The Farmland Security Zone legislation provides that the FSZ contracts must be for at least a 20-year period. In order to qualify for a FSZ, a majority of the land must be one or more of the following classifications, as designated by the California Department of Conservation Important Farmland Series maps: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Local Importance. The legislation does not include cancellation provisions ("The Farmland Security Zone: Preserving California's Prime Agricultural Farmland," California Farm Bureau Federation website, November 1999.)

Yolo County implemented the FSZ in 2000 where contracts a minimum of 100 acres in size and within 3 miles of city limit lines could be executed. The Agricultural Element emphasizes the use of Williamson Act preserves and Farmland Security Zones as tools to preserve agricultural lands.

3.5 Zoning/Minimum Agricultural Parcel Sizes

The minimum parcel size for Yolo County agricultural zones is 20 acres. The purpose of the minimum parcel size is to ensure that parcels specifically designated for agricultural uses are large enough to sustain themselves while minimizing incompatibility between adjacent land uses. While the minimum agricultural parcel size in Yolo County is 20 acres, most land in the unincorporated area is in zones with much larger minimum parcel sizes. The most widely applied zone in Yolo County, the A-P zone (with 477,218 acres) has a minimum parcel size of 80 acres (cultivable, irrigated), 160 acres (cultivable, non-irrigated), and 320 acres (not cultivable). The zone with the next highest acreage, the A-1 zone (with 128,336 acres), has a minimum parcel size of 20 acres, as does the A-E zone (with 1,655 acres). The Agricultural Element provides for maintaining agricultural zoning with minimum parcel sizes capable of sustaining agriculture, while also recognizing the need to accommodate smaller, more intensively farmed existing parcels of land.

3.6 Role of Small Farms

The predominant parcel size in Yolo County is over 100 acres. According to the 1997 U.S. Census of Agriculture, Yolo County's 923 farms average 581 acres in size, and over half the farms are 50 acres in size or larger. Yolo County's Zoning Ordinance does not encourage small parcels or "hobby farms." However, 139 farms are less than 10 acres, and 282 farms are between 10 and 49 acres. There is a role for small farms in production of commodities that do not require large acreages to be commercially viable. Examples include organic farming, herbs, and crops grown for local roadside stands and farmers' markets.

The National Commission on Small Farms, appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture in 1997, established the following policy goals for a national strategy for small farms:

- Recognize the importance and cultivate the strengths of small farms
- Create a framework of support and responsibility for small farms
- Promote, develop, and enforce fair, competitive, and open markets for small farms
- Conduct appropriate outreach through partnerships to serve small farm and ranch operators
- Establish future generations of farmers
- Emphasize sustainable agriculture as a profitable, ecological, and socially sound strategy for small farms
- Dedicate budget resources to strengthen the competitive position of small farms in American agriculture
- Provide just and humane working conditions for all people engaged in production agriculture.

"Small farms" are defined by the USDA Commission based on gross receipts rather than acreage. A small farm is described as having less than $250,000 annual gross receipts, on which day-to-day labor and management are provided by the farmer and/or the farm family that owns the production or owns, or leases, the productive assets. This description applies to approximately 94 percent of all farms in the United States. According to the Commission's report *A Time to Act* (January, 1998):

> Small farms contribute more than farm production to our society. Small farms embody a diversity of ownership, cropping systems, landscapes, biological organization, culture, and traditions. Since the majority of farmland is managed by a large number of small farm operators, the responsible management of soil, water, and wildlife encompassed by these farms produces significant environmental benefits. Decentralized land ownership produces more equitable economic opportunity for people in rural communities, and offers self-employment and business management opportunities. Farms, particularly family farms, can be nurturing places for children to grow up and acquire the values of responsibility and hard work.

According to the Commission's report, some of the public values generated by small farms include:

- Diversity (of ownership, cropping systems, landscapes, biological organization, culture and traditions)
- Environmental benefits
- Self-empowerment and community responsibility
- Places for families
- Personal connection to food
- Economic foundations

The role of small farms in Yolo County is expected to increase in importance through the development of public policy that will recognize and support them as well as actively encourage their growth and continuation. With the implementation of government and private initiatives and the stimulation of new markets, small farms are expected to thrive and contribute to the nation's food supply, fuel local economies, and energize rural communities.

An example of an initiative that assists small farms is being undertaken in nearby Sonoma County, where food product businesses have begun to band together to "brand" their products with the slogan "Sonoma Select" as a means to identify a unified theme of high quality and broad product group identification. The logo is being placed on packaging, local menus and in stores. Early indications of this program are that it is boosting local sales.

History has taught that there must be economically sensible reasons for land to remain in agriculture. Where such reasons were not present, market forces have inevitably displaced agriculture with higher value non-agricultural uses. Although direct public investment may preserve relatively small portions of the agricultural landscape, most investment must come from the private sector. To encourage this continued investment, Yolo County must maintain flexibility to respond to changing market forces. The higher value Yolo County agricultural enterprise of the future may be more intensive and less extensive. Specialty crops typically require less land and more technically advanced processing and handling. This may call for a movement toward smaller farms, not larger ones. In some instances a greater clustering around technology providers will occur; however, organic farming areas will remain separate and distinct in order to provide the type of controlled organic environment necessary to support an organic farming philosophy. The Agricultural Element provides for the establishment of several small or specialty farming/technology districts, with restrictions on use of land to avoid large lot rural residential uses or "ranchettes." Specialty farming areas may be ideally suited for locations that have already been subdivided into smaller parcels, if water and soil conditions are appropriate.

3.7 Provision for Agricultural Worker Housing

The State of California Employment Development Department (EDD) reported that in June 2000, 6,900 persons were directly employed in agriculture in Yolo County. The figures include farmers and unpaid family members and do not include a breakdown of the permanent and seasonal workforce. The State of California defines seasonal employees as those who are employed fewer than 150 consecutive days by the same employer. Seasonal workers may be migratory or they may be persons or family members who are temporarily employed but permanently located in Yolo County. The State defines a local worker as a seasonal laborer who resides close enough to the job site to return home each night.

Farmworker and migrant worker housing needs are one of the more important housing issues in Yolo County because of the County's agriculture-based economy. Because farmworkers tend to have the lowest incomes among all workers, they need housing affordable to households earning 50 percent or less of the median income.

According to the *Housing Element* of the *Yolo County General Plan* (1991), there are two migrant housing centers administered by the Yolo County Housing Authority in the unincorporated area. One of these centers near the City of Davis has 75 units housing 386 persons. The other center, located near the community of Madison, has 90 units housing over 410 persons. Both of these centers operate at full capacity. Rehabilitation of the migrant center near the community of Madison was established as a top priority in the 1991 *Housing Element*, and the rehabilitation was completed in 1996.

The *Housing Element* reports that some of the demand for migrant housing has been alleviated by permanent trailers installed on farms. According to the Housing Element, this may decrease some of the demand for the two migrant centers; however, there is still a large group of migrant families living in the two centers on a seasonal basis. Housing shortages may exist during peak seasonal labor periods when a large influx of migrant workers occurs, such as during the tomato

harvest. During these periods, every form of temporary, substandard and standard shelter may be occupied.

Housing costs in Yolo County are relatively high, compared to the region, due to limited supply and high housing prices in Davis. In June 2001 the Sacramento Bee reported the median resale housing price in Yolo County was $209,000, an increase of 23 percent in the last year.

The Agricultural Element provides for agricultural worker housing in areas suitable for agricultural support services. In recognition of the importance of the agricultural economic base of Yolo County, the Agricultural Element calls for the cities in Yolo County to share in the responsibility for providing adequate sites for such housing.

3.8 Antiquated Subdivisions

This topic refers to the existence of old subdivisions (subdivisions that exist "on paper" only) created in agricultural areas, prior to modern regulations and practices regarding the division of land. The State Subdivision Map Act and the Yolo County Subdivision Ordinance require that new subdivisions be consistent with the General Plan, and that roads and other infrastructure be installed prior to the sale of lots and construction of dwellings. Land must also be properly zoned to permit subdivisions. The Yolo County Zoning Code was amended in June, 2000 to require lots in an antiquated subdivision to meet minimum lot area for the zone in which they are located, or comply with other specific requirements related to sewer and water service, road frontage, fire protection, and the County's "Right-to-Farm" ordinance.

The existence of these old lots represents a potential that they may be sold and developed at some point in the future, in inappropriate locations and without necessary facilities and services. Problems which may result include an unanticipated demand for County services at remote locations and urban/agricultural land use conflicts.

The State Subdivision Map Act provides that the local agency (in this case, the County) can initiate the merger of contiguous parcels under common ownership in accordance with Government Code Section 66451.10 *et seq*. The law requires that the County adopt an ordinance to implement the procedures prescribed in the Map Act. A merger can be initiated if any one of the contiguous parcels does not conform to the standards for minimum parcel size in the County Zoning Ordinance, and all of the requirements in the Map Act are satisfied, which include absence of structures on at least one parcel, substandard lot area, lack of compliance with laws and ordinances in effect at the time the subdivision was created, lack of compliance with current standards for sewage disposal and domestic water supply, legal access, health and safety hazards, and consistency with general and specific plans. Other restrictions on mergers apply as set forth in the Map Act.

The local ordinance may establish the standards described above which are applicable to parcels to be merged, regarding sewage disposal and water supply, slope stability standards, access, health and safety hazards, and plan consistency. Adoption of such an ordinance would provide the County with the necessary tools to merge old paper subdivisions which remain under common ownership. The difficulty with actually accomplishing such mergers is that there is

normally a high level of opposition to such mergers by property owners, who may view such action as depriving them of property rights and future development potential.

Other, less traditional approaches are available to the County to address antiquated subdivisions. One approach would be to provide incentives to allow "clustered" development in such a subdivision, consolidating residences on one or more lots with shared water and wastewater disposal, and placing the remainder in an agricultural conservation easement or other preservation vehicle. This would allow landowners to preserve some development opportunities, while at the same time providing for utility services (the lack of which prevents development of most antiquated subdivisions) and preserving agricultural lands. Stanislaus County places limitations on new dwellings on parcels less than 20 acres that are not in compliance with the minimum area requirements of the zoning district where the parcel is located, requiring specific findings to be made that the dwelling will not be substantially detrimental to or in conflict with agricultural use of other property in the vicinity.

The Agricultural Element calls for the County to use its zoning powers to discourage the use of antiquated subdivisions for nonagricultural use. As mentioned in Section 3.6, specialty farming areas may be ideally suited for locations that have already been subdivided into smaller parcels, if water and soil conditions are appropriate. Under these circumstances, such areas need not undergo lot mergers. Easements to allow specialty farming are another possible approach.

3.9 Conservation Easements and Land Acquisition by Public Agencies

As described by the American Farmland Trust (*Saving American Farmland: What Works*, 1997), the purchase of agricultural conservation easements (PACE) refers to programs that pay property owners to keep land available for agriculture.

> Typically, landowners sell agricultural conservation easements to a government agency or private conservation organization. The agency or organization typically pays the difference between the value of the land for agriculture and the value of the land for its "highest and best use," which is generally residential or commercial development.
>
> Legal covenants impose a conservation easement that "runs with the land," prohibiting all future owners of the property from developing it – or using it in any manner that negatively affects its future agricultural viability – unless the document establishing the easement provides that the easement may be terminated for cause or at the end of a specified period of time. After selling an easement, the landowner retains all other rights of ownership, including the right to farm the land, prevent trespass, sell, bequeath or otherwise transfer the land to others. An agency or organization that buys an easement does not acquire the right to build anything on the land, but only the right and responsibility to prevent development.

According to the American Farmland Trust, conservation easements serve four principal functions that contribute to farmland protection:

- PACE prevents non-agricultural development that would effectively foreclose the possibility of farming. Because such development often conflicts with neighboring agricultural operations, PACE helps protect their economic viability as well.

- Removing the development potential from farmland generally reduces its future market value. This may help facilitate farm transfer to the children of farmers and make the land more affordable to beginning farmers and others who want to buy it for agricultural purposes. The reduction in market value may also reduce property taxes and help prevent them from rising.

- PACE provides landowners with liquid capital that can enhance the economic viability of individual farming operations and help perpetuate family tenure on the land. For example, the proceeds from selling agricultural conservation easements may be used to reduce debt, expand or modernize farm operations, invest for retirement or settle estates. The reinvestment of PACE funds in equipment, livestock and other farm inputs may also stimulate local agricultural economies.

- PACE gives communities a way to share the costs of protecting farmland with landowners. Non-farmers have a stake in the continuation of agriculture for a variety of reasons, including keeping locally grown food available and maintaining scenic and historic landscapes, open space, watersheds and wildlife habitat. PACE allows them to "buy into" the protection of farming and be assured that they are receiving something of lasting value. Landowners are given a financially competitive alternative to development as a means of cashing in a fair percentage of the equity in their land.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service administers the Farmland Protection Program (FPP). This is an important program that provides funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural uses. Working though existing programs the NRCS joins with state, local and tribal governments to acquire conservation easements or other interests from landowners. NRCS provides up to 50 percent the fair market value of the easement. To qualify, farmland must: be part of a pending offer from a state, local or tribe farmland protection program; be privately owned; have a conservation plan; be large enough to sustain agricultural production; be accessible to markets; have adequate agricultural support services and infrastructure; and have surrounding parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production. Requests for funding must be submitted to the NRCS during an application window period.

The Agricultural Element provides for the County to use an Agricultural Conservation Easement Program to protect and preserve agricultural lands, and encourages acquisition of agricultural conservation easements by State and federal agencies and private non-profit organizations.

As described in Section 3.11 below, the County Zoning Ordinance currently requires compensation for agricultural land conversion in the form of farmland conservation easements, deed restrictions, or other farmland conversion mechanism. The Agricultural Element establishes the policy framework for this requirement.

Acquisition of agricultural lands, through purchase or donation, by the County or another entity is one method of preserving agricultural lands. Funds are sometimes available through the State or foundations for acquisitions of this type. Because of the greater expense associated with the acquisition, conservation easements (described above) are more typically pursued by the County and nonprofit entities for agricultural land preservation.

3.10 The Role of Land Trusts

In 1988, the Yolo Land Trust was established in Yolo County. The Yolo Land Trust is a private, nonprofit corporation whose stated purpose and function is to:

- Acquire land or conservation easements on land of agricultural, habitat, historical, recreational, educational, scenic, ecological, or other environmental value within and surrounding Yolo County in a manner designed to assist in the preservation of such land for the benefit of the public.

- Provide education and disseminate information concerning the values and benefits of land conservation.

- To encourage the benefits of sound land use planning for Yolo County.

The Yolo Land Trust has assisted in the permanent preservation of over 3,512 acres of prime agricultural land in the county.

The Land Trust is responsible for the creation of the following land trust easements in Yolo County as of October 2000:

- Rumsey Rancheria Easement – 84 acres located northwest of Woodland

- John Williamson Easement – 403 acres located northeast of Davis

- Davis Golf Course Easement – 75 acres located west of Davis

- Los Rios Farms Easement – 780 acres located southeast of Davis

- Delta Sugar Easement – 61 acres located north of Clarksburg

- Longview Ranch Easement – 113 acres west of Winters

- Cache Creek Easements – 1,997 acres north of Woodland

The Agricultural Element promotes the acquisition of agricultural conservation easements through (1) a County program (AP-2), (2) through local, State and federal agencies, and (3) through private non-profit organizations such as the Yolo Land Trust (AP-3). The Open Space and Recreation Element calls for the establishment of a nonprofit Yolo Legacy Trust that would work in concert with the above-identified entities to preserve open space land in Yolo County (OI-6).

3.11 Agricultural Lands Conversion Ordinance

The Yolo County Board of Supervisors adopted amendments to the A-P, A-E, A-1 and AGI Zones in January 2000 to eliminate ambiguities and provide more precise terminology. Prior to adoption of these amendments, many applications required review and approval by the County Planning Commission, even though the criteria for approval were clearly set forth in the Zoning Code. It was determined that requiring Planning Commission involvement for fairly straightforward applications was inefficient and resulted in unnecessary delays to applicants. The Zoning Code amendments remedied this by establishing minor use permits and major use permits. Minor use permits may be approved without Planning Commission review, while major use permits still require review and approval by the Planning Commission. Public hearings are still required for both minor and major use permits.

The Zoning Code was also amended to require agricultural mitigation for zone changes from an agricultural zoning classification to a non-agricultural classification. One acre of agricultural land is required as mitigation for each acre of agricultural land changed to a non-agricultural zoning classification (1:1 ratio). Agricultural mitigation can be satisfied by one of the following:

(1) Granting, in perpetuity, a farmland conservation easement, a farmland deed restriction, or other farmland conservation mechanism to, or for the benefit of, the County and/or other qualifying entity as acceptable and approved by the County; and, the payment of fees sufficient to compensate for all administrative costs incurred by the County or easement holder inclusive of trust funds for the purpose of legal defense, monitoring and all other services provided; or,

(2) Upon adoption of an Agricultural Conservation Easement Program by the County, payment of an in-lieu fee sufficient to purchase a farmland conservation easement, farmland deed restriction, or other farmland conservation mechanism consistent with the provisions of this section; and, the payment of fees sufficient to compensate for all administrative costs incurred by the County inclusive of trust funds for the purpose of legal defense, monitoring and all other services provided. The in lieu fee, paid to the County, shall be used for agricultural mitigation purposes only, i.e. purchases of conservation easements.

To qualify as agricultural mitigation, land must meet criteria that include soil quality, water supply adequacy, proximity to the subject site, and other relevant criteria. The Agricultural

Element provides the policy framework for these amendments to the Zoning Code and proposes that the County also consider land value when establishing mitigation ratios.

LAFCo Agricultural Lands Conservation Policy

In 1994, the Yolo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) adopted the Agricultural Conservation Policy to preserve Yolo County agricultural lands and discourage the premature conversion of prime agricultural land to urban uses. The Conservation Policy includes policy guidelines, implementation strategies, and policy standards which are applied to proposed boundary changes for cities and special districts when urban development is the ultimate goal.

The Policy Guidelines read as follows:

1. Existing developed areas should be maintained and renewed.

2. Vacant land within developed areas should be developed before agricultural land is annexed for non-agricultural purposes.

3. Land substantially surrounded by existing agency boundaries should be annexed before other lands.

4. Urban development should be restricted in agricultural areas. For example, agricultural land should not be annexed for non-agricultural purposes when feasible alternatives exist.

5. The continued productivity and viability of agricultural land surrounding existing communities should be promoted, by preventing the premature conversion of agricultural land to other uses and, to the extent feasible, minimizing conflicts between agricultural and other land uses.

6. Development near agricultural land shall be consistent with the Yolo County Right to Farm Ordinance #1133 (as amended from time to time) and should not adversely affect the economic viability or constrain the lawful, responsible practices of the agricultural operations.

The following implementation strategies are contained in the Policy:

A. Detachment of prime agricultural lands and other open space lands shall be encouraged if consistent with the sphere of influence for that agency.

B. Annexation of prime agricultural lands shall not be approved unless the following factors have been considered:

    1. There is insufficient marketable, viable, less prime land available in the subject jurisdiction for the proposed land use.
    2. The adoption and implementation of effective measures to mitigate the loss of agricultural lands, and to preserve adjoining lands for agricultural use to prevent their premature conversion to other uses.

C. Proposals that would conflict with the goals of limiting urban sprawl shall be discouraged.

D. Annexation for land uses in conflict with an existing agricultural preserve contract shall be prohibited, unless the annexing agency protested the establishment of the contract and was upheld by LAFCO.

E. Less prime agricultural land generally should be annexed and developed before prime land is considered for boundary changes. The relative importance of different parcels of prime agricultural land shall be evaluated based upon the following (in a descending order of importance):

1. Soil classification shall be given the utmost consideration, with Class I or II soil receiving the most significance, followed by the Storie Index Rating.
2. Consideration shall also be given to the land's economic viability for continued agricultural use.
3. Parcels of less than twenty acres generally will not be considered viable farm units for the purposes of these criteria.

To assist LAFCo in making determinations under the above-described policy, a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment System (LESA) has been developed. The system rates land based on a 100-point scale and features two types of factors: land evaluation factors, focusing on inherent qualities of the soil resources and site assessment factors which deal with social, political and geographic issues that are considered important measures of agricultural significance, such as parcel size and proximity to urban areas.

As noted in the previous section, the Agricultural Element establishes the policy framework for the County's agricultural lands conversion ordinance. Yolo County LAFCo maintains and implements the agricultural lands conservation policy described in this section at the time a city makes a request for annexation of unincorporated territory.

3.12 Nuisance Factors

The potential for land use conflicts exists wherever agricultural and urban land uses are in proximity to one another. In Yolo County, this situation occurs around the edges of the cities of Davis, West Sacramento, Winters and Woodland, and around unincorporated communities such as Yolo, Zamora, Dunnigan, Esparto, Clarksburg, Knights Landing and Madison. Such conflicts can also occur, and may even be more acute, when residences are located on relatively small, scattered parcels in agricultural areas. Potential sources of conflict include noise from agricultural operations (including farm equipment and crop dusting), drift of agricultural chemicals, restrictions on application of agricultural chemicals due to nearby residences, dust, odors, and vandalism of farms. Nearby residents may resent the intrusion of farm operations, and farmers may resent limitations imposed on their operations by encroaching development.

In 1991, Yolo County adopted a "Right to Farm" ordinance to protect agricultural operations from nuisance claims. Nuisance complaints can occur if non-agricultural land uses, such as residential development, locate adjacent to existing agricultural lands. These complaints can often cause the curtailment of agricultural operations and discourage investments for the

improvement of agricultural land. This ordinance limits the circumstances in which agricultural operations may be considered a nuisance. The Right to Farm ordinance ultimately serves as an effective way of informing the public that the use of land for agricultural activity is a high priority.

Agricultural processing plants and facilities, such as food processing or packing operations, may also result in land use conflicts, whether inside or adjacent to a community. It is important to recognize that such uses are industries, and present the same potential or actual conflicts as many manufacturing uses, including noise, light and glare, odor and traffic.

Because agriculture is held in such high esteem in Yolo County, and because the County has discouraged rural residential-type development, opportunities for urban/agricultural conflicts have been minimized. The Agricultural Element offers the opportunity to further clarify policy regarding appropriate locations for agriculturally-related industry.

The Agricultural Element includes policies intended to ensure the compatibility of land uses adjacent to agricultural operations, so that agricultural productivity is not adversely affected. The Agricultural Element also calls for the adoption of Right to Farm ordinances by Yolo County cities.

3.13 Agricultural Buffers

Some jurisdictions use buffers to separate agricultural and urban or rural residential land uses. Buffers can serve two purposes: to minimize or avoid urban/agricultural land use conflicts, and to establish a limit beyond which urban development will not occur. They can be considered temporary or permanent. The *Agricultural Element* of the *County of Sacramento General Plan* provides that buffers shall be used to separate farming practices incompatible with adjacent urban uses. The *Agricultural Element* includes the following implementation measure for buffers:

- Develop and implement guidelines for design of buffers to be established between areas in a Permanent Agricultural Zone proposed for conversion from agricultural to urban use and adjacent farmlands. Develop and implement procedures for evaluating site-specific buffer proposals and making recommendations to the County Planning Commission. Title to buffer areas may be transferred to the County or other appropriate entity, but shall be credited to the proposed development as open space. Buffer design criteria shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

    - Buffers shall generally consist of a physical separation 300-500 feet wide including roadways;
    - Narrower buffers may be approved depending on the natural features of the buffer, applicable specific plan policies, and on the relative intensities of the proposed urban use and the adjacent agricultural use;
    - Buffers shall be established on the parcel proposed for development and be fenced along its urban side and posted against trespass; and

- Develop and implement guidelines for maintenance of buffers including, but not limited to, the following criteria:
  - The County, a homeowners association, or other appropriate entity shall maintain buffers to control litter, fire hazards, and pests;
  - Compatible agriculture shall be allowed on buffers; and
  - Buffers may be removed once agricultural uses on all adjacent parcels have permanently ceased.

The *City of Davis General Plan Update* provides for an "Urban Agricultural Transition Area" which provides a Planned Urbanized Edge that minimizes conflicts between urban and agricultural areas, and provides public open space. General Plan policies provide that segments can vary in size and width, but that the minimum width should be 150 feet. Allowable uses include recreation, trails and bikeways, wildlife and habitat preservation, drainage ways, community gardens, plant stock portions of nurseries, and agriculture. The policies provide that prime agricultural land should remain in agricultural production in the wider segments of the Urban Agricultural Transition Area.

The *Agricultural Element* of the *Butte County General Plan* also provides for development to provide land use transitions, setbacks and buffers between urban development and agricultural interface to reduce interference and conflict. The *Agricultural Element* includes a program for the Zoning Ordinance to require that a buffer be established on property proposed for residential development in order to protect existing agricultural uses from incompatible use conflicts. The desired standard shall be 300 feet, but may be adjusted to address unusual circumstances. The Element provides for the County to develop guidelines illustrating buffer requirements for various situations.

The Agricultural Element provides for appropriate buffers between new urban (non-agricultural) uses and agricultural lands.

3.14 Economic Development and Sustainability

The University of California, Davis operates a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP). According to the University, sustainable agriculture integrates three main goals: environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity.

Stewardship of both natural and human resources is of prime importance. As stated in their document "What is Sustainable Agriculture?" (Feenstra, Gail; Ingels, Chuck; Campbell, David; et al, 2000):

> A *systems perspective* is essential to understanding sustainability. The system is envisioned in its broadest sense, from the individual farm, to the local ecosystem, *and* to communities affected by this farming system both locally and globally. An emphasis on the system allows a larger and more thorough view of the consequences of farming practices on both human communities and the environment. A systems approach gives us the tools to explore the interconnections between farming and other aspects of our environment.

Several strategies are outlined for realizing these broad themes or goals, grouped into three areas of concern: farming and natural resources, plant and animal production practices, and economic, social and political context.

Sustainability can also refer to maintaining a critical acreage mass in production of a particular commodity to support the infrastructure and processing needs for that commodity (e.g., seed companies, agricultural machinery suppliers, etc.) The central location of Yolo County with respect to other agricultural counties in the region (Solano, Colusa and Sutter) and the size of Yolo County's agricultural economy help assure that this critical acreage mass will remain. However, the recent loss of sugar beet and tomato processing facilities due to other economic reasons will affect the acreage planted to these crops.

As reported in the *Agricultural and Tourism Targeted Industry Analysis*, the following factors contribute to assuring that this critical acreage mass is maintained:

> The American Farmland Trust's projected urban and suburban development and the resultant loss of farmland in the San Joaquin Valley and counties to the south and east of Yolo County will increase the demand for raw materials from prime farmland in Yolo County and other areas in the Sacramento Valley...Thus, the remaining farmland in the Sacramento Valley will become progressively more important and valuable as a source of raw farm commodities...Yolo County's apparent ability to withstand the pressures of urbanization result from a combination of factors including the strength of the LAFCo, restrictive land use policies, a selective permitting process and the general conservation mindset of residents and their political representatives. Moreover, Yolo County currently has 447,493 acres enrolled in the Williamson Act, California's farmland preservation legislation, which accounts for 72% of the county's landmass. The Yolo causeway also creates a natural barrier to the western expansion of Sacramento.

Although past practices have served Yolo County well, changing times require additional innovation. A need exists for new policies and initiatives capable of sustaining Yolo County agriculture in the twenty-first century. The County must be ever more proactive, providing incentives and purpose for the continuation of agriculture. An economically sensible and sustainable program must be identified if agriculture is to resist market forces to convert land to other uses. The choice may be between a modified agricultural setting and the loss of agriculture. To be successful, any program must not only address the traditional regulatory component of agricultural land preservation, but also:

- The necessity to accommodate and encourage conversion from lower to higher value added crops and agricultural commodities;

- Continuation of an affordable and reliable agricultural water supply;

- The maintenance and creation of new markets for traditional as well as higher value added crops and agricultural commodities;

- Creation of the additional educational, technical, processing and marketing infrastructure necessary to support a changing agricultural environment;

- Reuse of agricultural infrastructure that is no longer needed due to changing markets and a changing economy;

- State mandates to construct affordable housing within unincorporated areas.

- Protection of natural resources on agricultural lands as land use intensifies.

The Agricultural Element addresses and provides policy direction on these topics.

3.15 Agriculturally-Related Industrial Development

The *Yolo County Agricultural and Tourism Targeted Industry Analyses* recommends that the County establish Agribusiness Development Areas for targeted agribusinesses that do not require high quality soils for their direct operations. These include food processing companies, conventional tomato plants and tomato remanufacturing plants, seed conditioning plants, seed support manufacturing facilities, and alfalfa and rice straw processing plants. These areas include locations along the I-5 road and rail corridor in Yolo, Zamora and Dunnigan, and along Interstate 505 in Madison and Winters.

The report provides the following recommendations regarding locations for targeted industries:

- Nursery operations are recommended to be located in the Winters region, Clarksburg, the southern portion of the Plainfield Ridge, and selected regions along the Sacramento River north of I-5 and north of Zamora. Nursery operations require space for greenhouses, test and production fields, space to prepare product for market, and office space.

- Agricultural biotechnology research and development companies are recommended to be located in the cities of Davis, Woodland and West Sacramento. Production is recommended to be located in the cities or in the Agribusiness Development Areas. These companies typically need research and development space, greenhouse space, office space, and some fields for crop testing.

- Breeding stations and production facilities for seed companies are recommended to be located in the current cluster of seed firms around Woodland and between Woodland and Davis. These companies need greenhouse space, packing and shipping space, fields for planting, space for offices (including administration and, if a retail location, perhaps telephone call center space.)

- Winegrape acreage will continue to be located in the Clarksburg and Dunnigan region. Wineries could be located in the Dunnigan Hills and Clarksburg regions or in the Agribusiness Development Areas. Consideration can be given to clustering smaller wineries and/or their tasting rooms in a single high-traffic location to attract visitors.

Increasingly, agricultural commodities are shipped by air. The presence of major airport cargo facilities in the region provides a significant opportunity to ship high value added products from Yolo County worldwide. Regional promotion of Yolo County products must also be aggressively pursued by farmers and/or the Farm Bureau, utilizing County "branding" of local commodities. This could take the form of a prominent Yolo County logo or other identification on all products processed in the County similar to "Sonoma Select." Farmer's markets featuring branded Yolo County products should be promoted within Yolo County in conjunction with an agricultural tourism program, but also in adjoining metropolitan areas. Yolo County branded products should have a prominent place in farmer's markets in both the Sacramento region and the Bay Area.

As existing agricultural processing infrastructure is abandoned, its reuse should be actively marketed; however, it must also be recognized that some of this infrastructure cannot be efficiently reused and may require removal. The County's focus must be on the attraction of technologically advanced infrastructure that supports handling and processing of high value crops as well as those that can be branded as originating in Yolo County. This will include a variety of fruit, nuts, vines, seeds and organically grown commodities. It could include cut flowers and also components of the dairy industry.

The Agricultural Element addresses and provides policy direction on these issues to support a healthy and competitive agricultural community and economy.

"High Tech" Agriculture and its Potential

New agricultural technologies identified in the *Agricultural and Tourism Targeted Industry Analyses* include agricultural software (applications of computer technology to agriculture), specialty fertilizers, moisture sensing equipment for irrigation control, "precision" farming based on use of geographic information systems, remote sensing, robotics, computer technology and biorational and sustainable farming practices which will support twenty-first century agriculture. "High tech" agriculture has the potential to produce higher yields at lower costs. Remote sensing has the capacity to detect specific problem areas and treat them with precision. Position sensitive crop management conserves water and dispenses chemicals in a judicious manner, as compared to indirect methods. Biorational techniques can manage insects through the use of non-toxic behavioral chemicals. Biorational techniques are related to integrated pest management, which uses biological controls to control pests with minimum harmful side effects. Biorational techniques are those techniques that are compatible with the use of biological control, or have little impact on natural enemies. Through the implementation of sustainable agriculture, natural resource degradation can be reduced or prevented. Environmental health can be maintained through the use of reduced-volume irrigation systems, reduced tillage, and the efficient use of inputs.

The USDA policy goals and recommendations for small farms (see Section 3.6, Role of Small Farms) recommends emphasizing sustainable agriculture as a profitable, ecological and socially sound strategy. Large scale production often requires the use of intensive systems that may harm the natural environment, whereas sustainable agriculture can produce higher value products

using methods consistent with long-term environmental enhancement and higher returns per acre.

The presence of U.C. Davis, a premier location for agricultural research internationally, positions Yolo County to be in the forefront for the application of high technology to agriculture.

Wineries

As described in previous sections, wine grapes have increased substantially in revenues and acreage in Yolo County since 1984. Wine grapes and wineries were ranked first as a targeted industry for Yolo County's agribusiness attraction program in the *Yolo County Agricultural and Tourism Targeted Industry Analyses*. The report listed eight wineries located in Yolo County in 1996, and noted that most wine grapes in Yolo County are grown on contract for wineries outside the county. This may result in a growing demand for greater processing and aging capacity within Yolo County. The wine grape industry is clustered in the Clarksburg and Dunnigan Hills appellation areas. At the time the report was published, approximately 49 percent of total acreage was located in the Clarksburg area, while 43 percent was located in Dunnigan and 8 percent outside the two areas. The two major vineyards, Bogle Winery and RH Phillips, are located in Clarksburg and Dunnigan, respectively.

Several factors give Yolo County a competitive advantage in this industry, including the U.C. Davis Department of Viticulture and Enology, climate, lower costs and production expenses, and lower land costs than Napa and Sonoma counties. Challenges faced by the industry include a shortage of water in the Dunnigan Hills region, high water tables in the Clarksburg area, and price swings in winegrape prices. In addition, land in the Dunnigan Hills is classified as "Highly Erodible" by the NRCS. Placement of vineyards on these steep soils can result in sheet and rill erosion unless protected by conservation practices such as cover crops and grassed waterways.

Non-traditional Agricultural Operations

Examples of non-traditional agricultural operations include aquaculture, hydroponics and tree farms. None of these is mentioned in the annual Agricultural Crop Report issued by the Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner, presumably because revenues are below the cutoff point. Other examples of "non-traditional" or specialty operations identified in the *Yolo County Agricultural and Tourism Targeted Industry Analyses* include:

- Grape rootstock and grape plant nurseries
- Hardy perennial wholesale nurseries
- Specialized nurseries applying advanced genetics and agricultural biotechnology to their plant development programs
- Specialized nurseries for California native and drought-resistant plants
- Fruit tree nurseries

- Regional wholesale nurseries
- Sod farms
- Seed support industries
- Agricultural software
- Specialty fertilizers

Wholesale nurseries, including sod farms, are located in a narrow band running from Winters along the southern portion of the county to Davis. Retail nurseries are primarily located in Woodland and Davis. Seed companies are primarily located in Woodland or between Woodland and Davis. Companies and organizations which support the seed industry are located primarily in Davis and Woodland.

Organically grown fruits and vegetables are also "non-traditional' farming activities ideally suited for Yolo County. Organic growing is well established here and some of the oldest organic farms in the U.S. are in the Capay Valley. The conservation and enhancement of the soil has always been a high priority in organic agriculture. Small farms have an established track record as being well suited for this type of value added agriculture and the market for organic products is growing both nationally and internationally.

3.16 Biotechnology and Agriculture

Agricultural biotechnology is identified in the *Yolo County Agricultural and Tourism Targeted Industry Analyses* as the use of living organisms, including microbes, plants and animals, or materials produced from living organisms, to produce useful products such as pest and disease resistant crops, improved foods and animal vaccines. It includes enzymes produced in fermentation processes, biorational and natural pest control products, genetically transformed food and animal products, and the use of plants to produce human therapeutics. The report identified the following opportunities for business expansion in agricultural biotechnology:

- Biotechnology research and development companies
- Animal-oriented agricultural biotechnology companies
- Domestic and international seed companies
- Agricultural biotechnology production companies
- Start-up agricultural biotechnology companies
- Seed and chemical companies
- Advanced agricultural technologies

The Sacramento Business Journal lists the top 25 bioscience companies (mostly a medical emphasis) and the top 25 biotechnology companies (mostly an agricultural emphasis) in the Sacramento region (Sacramento Business Journal, "1999 Top 25 Book of Lists," December 1999). Of the 50 firms, 8 bioscience firms and 15 biotechnology firms are located in Yolo County. Yolo County clearly has strength in agricultural biotechnology. These companies are clustered in or near Davis, Woodland and West Sacramento. The largest Yolo bioscience firm, Dade Microscan in West Sacramento, has 500 local employees. The largest biotechnology firm, Seminis Vegetable Seeds, Inc., has 180 local employees.

Agricultural biotechnology was ranked second as a targeted industry in Yolo County's agribusiness attraction program in the *Agricultural and Tourism Targeted Industry Analysis*. Competitive advantages in Yolo County include the presence of U.C. Davis, the existing cluster of agricultural biotechnology companies, the diversity of crops, a receptive farming community, and proximity to the San Francisco Bay Area. Due to the large number of bioscience and biotechnology firms in Yolo County, the presence of U.C. Davis, and the proximity to the San Francisco Bay Area, in the future, biotechnology development should become an important agricultural industry in Yolo County.

The Agricultural Element supports these concepts by calling for identification of appropriate sites for agricultural industry and promoting research, development and use of high technology agricultural practices, agricultural biotechnology, sustainable agriculture, and non-traditional agricultural operations, including organic farming, to expand and improve opportunities for those engaged in agriculture.

Of importance to the biotechnology-related agricultural industry and the organic farming industry are new federal organic standards disallowing the presence of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in organic agricultural products. The demand for GMO free products is increasing both domestically and internationally, and there are countries that have banned products containing GMOs. Contamination of organic crops by genetically modified organisms is of growing concern in these segments of the agricultural industry. There have been a number of cases in which GMO crops have contaminated neighboring organic crops. This type of conflict may pose an increasing threat to these segments of the agricultural industry.

3.17 "Safe Harbor" Provisions for Adjoining Habitat

Farmers' practices can be affected by their concern that discovery of endangered species on their property could result in restrictions placed on their land management by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the California Department of Fish and Game. This concern can lead to farmers keeping stream banks and ditches clear of vegetation and repeated disking of fallow fields to keep wildlife out, when such areas could provide temporary wildlife habitat. Under the federal Safe Harbor Program, farmers can enter into an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to carry out and maintain specific habitat enhancements on portions of their property for a defined period of time. With such an agreement in place, should this habitat enhancement result in listed species moving on to the property, the farmer is not subject to any additional restrictions under the federal Endangered Species Act for species covered by the

agreement. The property owner is free to remove the habitat enhancement after the agreement has expired, since the normal restrictions of the Endangered Species Act only apply to the baseline conditions at such time as the safe harbor agreement was initiated ("Some Landowner Incentives for Rural Land Protection," *Linkages*, Winter 2000).

The Agricultural Element calls for use of "safe harbor" provisions for agricultural lands involved in habitat enhancement programs.

3.18 Other Agricultural Preservation Programs

During preparation of the Agricultural Element research was performed on how other countries address agricultural lands preservation. The countries of The Netherlands, Japan, the United Kingdom and Denmark were selected for review. These nations have different historical frameworks and land tenure systems than does the United States, and agricultural land preservation programs and techniques to control urbanization tend to be dictated from a central government rather than at the local level, as in California. Although visitors are frequently impressed with the compactness of European and Japanese towns and with their distinct urban edge, it is worth remembering that this development form has its roots in a feudal society where those engaged in agriculture did not own or live on the land. The experience of the United States is much different, with property ownership and the family farm being basic tenets of the country's founders and of our society. Some of the program features from these countries are described below:

The Netherlands

Prior to the 1970's The Netherlands' main land use objective was to control growth and develop "growth centers" with buffers as a way to redistribute population throughout the country. Unfortunately, the "growth centers" themselves placed even more pressure on the consumption of agricultural land. Needless to say the "growth center" concept is no longer used. Holland currently does not allow housing concentrations on the periphery of its cities and requires infilling.

Japan

Japan has a national rural policy. Local authorities developed a coordinated approach in the 1980's to consolidate pollution control, nature conservation and other relevant policies into a comprehensive environmental policy called a "local environmental plan." National legislation enacted in 1993 requires that a "local environmental plan" be adopted prior to developing in rural areas somewhat like the California Environmental Quality Act and California Planning Law.

Denmark

Denmark's focus has been to make agriculture more environmentally friendly through planning, conservation and nature protection legislation including ecological corridor protection. Denmark

has established a series of policies to curtail environmental degradation resulting from agriculture.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom developed a farmer payment program in 1988 called the "Arable Area Payments Scheme." This proposal had an unintended consequence since farmers with permanent pasture crops were not eligible and it gave them an incentive to plow up pasture for conversion to arable areas.

State programs were also reviewed and some of the more pertinent findings are described below. Although other state's programs are often characterized as models of land use practice superior to California's, it must be recognized that population growth in California dwarfs most other states, making the task many fold more difficult.

Maryland

The State of Maryland created the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program in 1977. This program's purpose is to preserve sufficient agricultural land to maintain a viable local base of food and fiber production for the present and future citizens of Maryland. The focus of this program is the establishment of agricultural preservation districts and the purchase of perpetual development rights. While this is a state funded and directed program, local government is usually involved in the implementation through review of landowner applications and the allocation of purchase funds. Montgomery County Maryland has been a leader in Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) programs to protect agricultural land.

Maryland also utilizes an "agricultural use assessment," similar to Williamson Act, which can be granted for farms meeting specific criteria. This program allows land to be appraised according to its current use and not according to its actual market value.

Pennsylvania

The State of Pennsylvania has a State Agricultural Conservation Easement Program to assure conservation of viable agricultural lands in order to protect the agricultural economy and natural and historic resources of Pennsylvania. The program consists of easement purchases, easement monitoring and management, and implementation of stream corridor/woodland easements to complement the farmland easement program.

Minnesota

The State of Minnesota has several programs to protect agriculture:

1. The Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Program is for metropolitan areas and begins with local governments identifying areas where agriculture is to be preserved. Farmers receive property tax credits and other benefits by placing a restrictive covenant on their land that limits its use to agriculture.

2. The Minnesota Agricultural Land Program is for non-metropolitan counties and authorizes counties to prepare an agricultural land preservation plan. Farmers are eligible to receive $1.50 per acre in property tax relief in exchange for agreeing to keep their land in agricultural use for up to eight years. Additional benefits to landowners include limits on annexations, exemptions from special assessments, expanded protection from eminent domain actions, prohibitions on siting public facilities and protection to use normal agricultural practices.

3. Cities and Counties are eligible to do Purchase of Development Rights and Transfer of Development Rights programs. These programs preserve agricultural land through acquiring or transferring the development potential of agricultural lands to other targeted areas.

4. A deferral of assessments and taxes payable on farmlands are available through the "Green Acres" Property Tax Deferment Program for those farmers who have valuations increased due to residential or commercial development potential.

Oregon, Florida and New Jersey

The States of Oregon, Florida, and New Jersey have specific statewide standards for directing urban growth and protecting resource areas through statewide comprehensive planning mandates passed in 1973, 1986, and 1992 respectively. The impetus for such state-mandated programs typically comes from environmental and urban interests and does not generally find great favor in rural areas.

Farmland protection varies in the three state programs. In the Oregon plan, counties are required to adopt exclusive farmland zones with residential limits. Oregon requires local governments to follow specific standards and adopt particular land use measures and has easement purchase programs. Due to ongoing problems with non-farm use dwellings being constructed in farming areas, in 1994 Oregon adopted new farm dwelling rules to ensure that new farm dwellings were for farmers. The rules are based on the three attributes that characterize a farm: size, capability and income as summarized in the Table below. For areas of high-value farmland, a gross income of $80,000 must be proven to build a farm dwelling. This value was established by a technical advisory committee of farmers, and was set at a value that would differentiate farmers from country dwellers while still allowing for start up farms. High-value farmland is characterized by exceptionally good soils rated as prime, unique, Class I, or Class II by the Soil Conservation Service. For other land in farm zones, counties are provided with three other tests, a lower income test, a parcel size test and a capability test. Generally the counties put all three options in to their codes and the landowner has three potential ways to qualify. The capability test is optional and few use it due to the complexity of calculating the required numbers.

Type of Test	Type of Farmland		
	High-Value Farmland (All Counties)	Farmland that is not High-Value	
		In Most Counties	In "Marginal Land" Counties

Parcel Size	-	At least 160 acres (320 for rangeland)	-
Production Capability	-	Can produce gross sales median of commercial farms	-
Income	$80,000	$40,000 or median of commercial farms	$20,000

Sources:

Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, Rules for New Farm Dwelling, March 1994. http://www.lcd.state.or.us/rural/farmdwel.htm, May 31, 2002.

Oregon Department of land Conservation and Development, Using Income Criteria to Protect Commercial Farmland in the State of Oregon, http://www.lcd.state.or.us/rural/dlcdfly.pdf, May 31, 2002.

Oregon Secretary of State, The Oregon Administrative Rules through May 15, 2002, Land Conservation and Development Division 33 Agricultural Land, http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/rules/OARS_600/OAR_660/660_033.html, May 31, 2002.

Ron Eber, Farm/Forest Specialist, Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, Personal Communication, May 31, 2002.

The New Jersey plan requires that, due to significant farmland losses between 1950 and 1987, farmland be treated as one of five types of planning areas established statewide. New Jersey has easement purchase programs and urban containment and resource protection programs. The Florida Growth Management Law does not specifically address farmland protection. It is inferred from policies dealing with compact development.

California

Although many of the international and state programs described above have merit, the State of California does not impose specific growth or protection standards upon local governments. In California, farmland protection is implemented through local voter initiatives, local general plan policies, the Williamson Act (1965) and locally initiated land acquisition or easement programs. As a result, agricultural preservation efforts are not uniform statewide.

Most counties have development restrictions on agricultural land. Notwithstanding the zoning process, Williamson Act contractual provisions are used in counties such as El Dorado, Tulare and Glenn to implement density restrictions. For example, under El Dorado County's Williamson Act regulations, a landowner who has entered into a contract may develop only one housing unit on the largest legal lot in the contracted area. If there are many lots in the contracted area, only one can be developed with a dwelling. The minimum acreage for a Williamson Act Contract area is determined by the County Agricultural Commissioner. The contract must contain enough area to be agriculturally viable. This could be as small as five acres under some conditions; however, according to the County, twenty-acre minimum contract sizes are more common. By contrast, in Glenn County, a property owner upon entering into a Williamson Act contract is required to legally merge all old (small) parcels in order to achieve a minimum parcel size of 80 acres. The Zoning Ordinance will then permit one single family dwelling for each

parcel of land (which would mean one single family dwelling unit per 80 acre parcel). Tulare County follows a similar practice.

In 1991 Sonoma County enacted a 0.25 percent sales tax for a period not to exceed 20 years. The purpose of the tax is to implement the Agricultural and Open Space Elements of the Sonoma County General Plan and further agricultural land preservation and open space acquisition in accordance with an expenditure plan approved by the voters in 1990 (Measure C). An Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District was formed within which the District can purchase interests in real property from willing sellers utilizing the sales tax and other sources.

Also see Section 3.1 for a discussion of other county programs.

With the passage of the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, the California Legislature elevated the powers of LAFCo to prevent urban sprawl, preserve open space and prime agricultural lands, and to ensure orderly extension of government services. Section 56301 of the Act recognizes the importance of efficiently accommodating growth within or through the extensions of the boundaries of existing agencies that can best provide services. Section 56300 (a) requires that LAFCo have written policies and procedures and to exercise its powers consistent with those policies and procedures. Yolo County LAFCo has been a leader in the agricultural lands preservation field and will find that the recent changes strengthen its role in this regard.

As has been described elsewhere in this Element, Yolo County is viewed as a leader in agricultural lands preservation programs. Most land preservation techniques that can be applied at the local level in California are available in Yolo County and are reflected in the policies of this Agricultural Element. Other techniques that require state or voter action cannot be applied without specific mandate. This would include additional funding sources for acquisition of threatened lands, voter approval of changes in use of land and actions based on uniform standards and criteria promulgated by the state.