

1.0 INTRODUCTION & VISION STATEMENT

Yolo County prides itself in the manner in which it has preserved its agricultural heritage. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, while other California counties were succumbing to the pressures of urban growth, Yolo County took deliberate steps to avoid a similar fate. Yolo County was among the first counties in California to place importance on agricultural lands preservation and enacted some of the earliest ordinances limiting use of agricultural lands, creating minimum parcel sizes and implementing the Williamson Act. The presence of the University of California, Davis, with its focus on agriculture and community of persons knowledgeable of agricultural issues, has aided in this effort.

Geography has also played a part. The County's distance from the Bay Area and the direction of growth in Sacramento County have helped insulate it from the strongest of these forces. These circumstances are changing, however, with significant growth pressure now extending along the I-80 corridor from the Bay Area through and beyond Yolo County. The Bay Area has nearly exhausted its options for growth. Impediments to growth from Sacramento County have also been reduced with the development of better access, the incorporation of the City of West Sacramento and expansion by the City of Sacramento into the Natomas Basin. In addition, much of eastern Yolo County is located just a few miles from a prominent transportation hub at Sacramento International Airport.

Although past practices have served the 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 support 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. To be successful, any program must not only address the traditional regulatory components 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.

To maintain its agricultural traditions and agricultural open space, Yolo County recognizes that change must occur. Lower value added crops, including many now grown in Yolo County (such as tomatoes), are no longer competitive, and will not be competitive in the domestic and international marketplace. In order to sustain a viable farm economy, the County must capitalize on its location adjacent to major transportation infrastructure and between two major metropolitan areas, to produce high value added commodities that can be consumed within the region as well as shipped around the world. Examples of the types of crops ideally suited for a locale such as Yolo County are organically grown fruits and vegetables, which are already well established in the Capay Valley and elsewhere. These are high value crops that find a ready market in the Sacramento and San Francisco Bay Area regions.

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, utilizing County “branding” of local commodities similar to “Sonoma Select” or “Placer Grown.” This could take the form of a prominent Yolo County logo or other identification on all products processed in the County. The County’s role would be to encourage the Farm Bureau and the agricultural community to pursue this approach. 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.

To remain competitive, Yolo County should encourage the agricultural community to move away from thinking of the field-grown commodity as the end result, and identify processed products in which to include Yolo County commodities.

In addition to recognizing nearby air transport facilities as significant agricultural assets, a “biotechnology zone” should be developed within Yolo County with the University of California, Davis as its potential focus. The biotechnology zone should be coordinated with similar efforts in Sacramento and Solano counties to support and expand a regional identity for “high tech” agricultural research and development.

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 will be more intensive and less extensive. Specialty crops typically require less land and more technically advanced processing and handling. This will lead to a trend toward smaller farms, not larger ones, and greater clustering around technology providers. The County should consider the establishment of small or specialty farming/technology districts, with sufficient restrictions on use of land to avoid large lot rural residential uses or “ranchettes.”

Specialty farming districts may be ideally suited for areas that have already been subdivided into smaller parcels, if water and soil conditions are appropriate.

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.

All of the above must be accompanied by a reliable and adequate water supply that is earmarked for agriculture and is not susceptible to export to support urban growth elsewhere. It must also be recognized that agriculture and intensive housing development require good design measures and siting to ensure compatibility.

In summary, although changes in the form and type of agriculture are inevitable in Yolo County, agriculture will continue to play a dominant role as a provider of wealth and beneficial user of open space. Support and promotion of a strong agricultural sector and agricultural technology must be given the highest priority, including examination of new ways to market Yolo County agricultural products and recognition of changing land tenure, infrastructure and processing needs.

1.1 Purpose of the Agricultural Element

The primary purpose of the Agricultural Element is to refine existing General Plan goals, objectives and policies, and to establish new goals, objectives and policies that address agricultural lands, agricultural industry and resource conservation. A related purpose is to insure long-term stability and productivity of the county's agricultural lands, while promoting agriculture as an industry that produces and processes food, fiber, animal husbandry and agricultural material. The Agricultural Element also consolidates the new and refined goals, objectives and policies in a single document.

The Agricultural Element is an optional General Plan element, and not one of the seven mandatory elements (which include land use, circulation, safety, noise, open space, conservation and housing). State law offers counties and cities considerable flexibility to adopt "any other elements or address any other subjects, which, in the judgment of the legislative body, relate to the physical development of the county or city." The process of adopting an Agricultural Element provides an opportunity for Yolo County to establish in the General Plan the relative importance of agricultural lands preservation locally, as compared to competing interests such as other forms of economic development, the construction of housing, and habitat preservation. Adopting an Agricultural Element is a public acknowledgement of the importance of preserving and conserving the county's agricultural lands and promotion of agriculture as an industry. The Agricultural Element establishes commitment by Yolo County to competitively apply for grants and other programs to obtain agricultural preservation funding.

The Agricultural Element expresses policies, programs and measures that promote and protect the current and future needs of farming operations and the agricultural industry. The Element's intent is to provide clear guidelines for land use decisions in agricultural areas with respect to all aspects of rural and agricultural industrial development, and to provide direction regarding the County's role in promoting the economic environment needed to maintain the primary role of agriculture in Yolo County.

1.2 Agricultural Element Diagram and Definitions

Figure 1-1 is the Agricultural Element Diagram, depicting areas designated for agricultural use, as well as Urban Boundaries for the four cities and the unincorporated communities of Capay, Clarksburg, Dunnigan, Esparto, Guinda, Knights Landing, Madison, Rumsey, Yolo and Zamora. Definitions are provided in this section for the "Agricultural" land use designation and the term "Urban Boundaries."

Agricultural. This land use designation is applied to lands best suited for agriculture, to preserve them from the encroachment of nonagricultural uses. It is intended to include lands in contracted agricultural preserves and Farmland Security Zones (FSZs), or lands suitable for such use. Uses approved on lands in agricultural preserves or Farmland Security Zones must be consistent and compatible with the provisions of State law and Yolo County ordinance.

Examples of uses which are considered appropriate under this designation include, but are not limited to: growing and harvesting field crops, grain and hay crops; growing and harvesting fruit and nut trees, vines and vegetables; wildlife preserves; growing and harvesting forest resources; pasture and grazing land; animal raising operations; agricultural-related essential industry and support services; uses related to natural resources; wineries; recreational uses; lodging; and residential uses, generally limited to housing for farm owners, family members, and farm laborers.

Zones that are consistent with this land use designation are the A-1, A-P and AGI zones. The minimum parcel sizes for the A-1 and A-P designations are 20 acres and 80 acres respectively. Properties in contracted agricultural preserves and FSZs may be required to have larger minimum parcel sizes, as provided by ordinance. Zones which are consistent with this land use designation are the A-1, A-P, and AGI zones. When applying the AGI Zone, the minimum parcel size shall be 1 acre.

Urban Boundary. Urban Boundaries define the ultimate growth areas around incorporated cities in which the County and the cities will coordinate plans, policies and standards related to building construction, land use and zoning regulations, street and highway construction, public utility systems, and other closely related matters affecting the orderly development between city limit lines and the urban boundary, in accordance with written agreements between the county and the respective cities.

Urban Boundaries are also established around the following unincorporated communities in Yolo County to serve as official urban planning areas for these communities: Capay, Clarksburg, Dunnigan, Esparto, Guinda, Knights Landing, Madison, Rumsey, Yolo and Zamora.

It is recognized that these boundaries provide an official definition of the planned interface between future urban and agricultural land uses.

1.3 Regional and Local Context

Yolo County includes the cities of Davis, West Sacramento, Woodland and Winters, as well as the unincorporated area of the county. Yolo County also includes the unincorporated communities of Capay, Clarksburg, Dunnigan, Esparto, Guinda, Knights Landing, Madison, Rumsey, Yolo and Zamora. This Agricultural Element, as an element of the Yolo County General Plan, applies only to the unincorporated area. However, Yolo County and its cities have a history of working cooperatively to protect and preserve agricultural land as one of the most important resources in the county.

Yolo County and its cities are part of the six-county region encompassed by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), which also includes the counties of El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, and Yuba. In the larger geographic sense, the valley portion of Yolo County is part of the Sacramento Valley, which with the San Joaquin Valley makes up the Central Valley of California. Yolo County is also part of the "I-80 Corridor" which extends between Sacramento and the Bay Area.

1.4 Demographics

Population projections for the period 2000 through 2022 prepared by SACOG in February 1999 for the six-county region including El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties anticipate a population increase of 872,808, an increase of almost 47 percent. Sacramento and Sutter counties, which are adjacent to Yolo County, have projected growth of 442,383 persons (37 percent) and 44,875 persons (55 percent), respectively. Placer County is also growing rapidly, with a projected population increase for the same period of 177,490 (44 percent).

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Yolo County had a resident population of 168,660 as of April 2000. Population projections for the county are 236,110 in 2020 and 242,510 in 2022 (SACOG, 1999). According to the State Employment Development Department (EDD), Yolo County is expected to experience a steady increase in population over this period. The gain in new residents will be approximately 61,300 by 2020, or a little over 37 percent. Based on County land use policies and zoning and Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) policies, it is evident that most of that population increase will occur in the cities, with limited growth in the unincorporated communities. According to information provided by SACOG (August 2000), only 21 housing units were constructed in the Yolo County unincorporated area in 1999, compared to a total of 1,301 in the incorporated cities. However, approximately 450 parcels in the unincorporated area of Yolo County have been tentatively approved for development of single family homes. While SACOG anticipates only 12.4 percent growth in the Yolo County unincorporated area, growth in the Sacramento County unincorporated area is projected at over 56 percent, and over 42 percent in Sutter County. With such high rates of

growth in the six-county region, increased pressure will be placed on Yolo County. It may be increasingly difficult to maintain the comparatively low growth rate of 12.4 percent.

1.5 Relationship to Other General Plan Elements

Concurrent with adoption of the Agricultural Element, the County is adopting an Open Space & Recreation Element. The Open Space Element is one of the seven mandatory General Plan elements and the new Open Space & Recreation Element will supersede the existing Open Space Element adopted in 1972. The recreation component is optional, and the County does not currently have a Recreation Element, although the General Plan does include recreation policies. It is common for counties and cities to combine the topics of recreation and open space into a single element.

The General Plan and its elements must, by law, be internally consistent. The concept of internal consistency means that no policy conflicts exist, either in the text or diagrams, between the components of the General Plan. All of the elements of a General Plan, including optional elements, must be consistent with one another. Additionally, all elements of the General Plan have equal legal status; that is, Agricultural Element policies are not superior to the policies of the Open Space & Recreation Element.

As stated in the *State of California General Plan Guidelines* (Office of Planning and Research, 1998):

The statutory requirements for the elements overlap and intertwine. For example, conservation of open-space and agricultural land are topics under the open-space and conservation elements as well as the land use element...The important thing is that the elements and issues form an integrated, internally consistent plan of which all parts are equally weighed in their application.

1.6 Document Organization

The Yolo County Agricultural Element consists of two documents: The Background Report, published under separate cover, and this Policy Document. The Background Report provides a comprehensive overview of the existing data available that addresses agricultural resources and issues for Yolo County. Information from the Background Report is summarized in the discussion of issues and incorporated into the goals, objectives and policies which comprise this Agricultural Element.

This Policy Document is organized into four chapters. Chapter One, Introduction, provides the context for the Agricultural Element. It also provides an Agricultural Element Diagram that identifies geographic areas of the County designated for agricultural use, and provides definitions for designations used on the Diagram. Chapter Two, Agriculture in Yolo County, provides a brief overview of the history of agriculture in Yolo County, agricultural conditions and trends. Chapter Three, Issues, provides a discussion of facts and findings for a series of agricultural issues identified in the course of preparing this Agricultural Element. Chapter Four,

the Agricultural Element, is the heart of this document. It presents the goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures which comprise the Agricultural Element.

1.7 How to Use the Agricultural Element

The general public, Board of Supervisors, County Planning Commission and County staff will use the Agricultural Element to determine County policy on issues affecting, or affected by, agriculture. This is useful when reviewing applications for changes in land use (zoning, conditional use permit, subdivision, etc.) or when deciding whether to submit such an application. More significantly, this document is useful to gain perspective on the importance of agriculture in Yolo County, not only to the local and regional economy, but also to Yolo County's identity. It provides a vision for Yolo County's future, agriculture's central role in that future, and how the County and its residents plan to attain that future vision.

Place Holder for
Figure 1-1 Agricultural Element Diagram