Farmland and Open Space Preservation in the Four North Bay Counties

by
Mary E. Handel, Research Assistant
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Research Paper #1
California Farmland & Open Space Policy Series
University of California, Davis

Farmland Policy Project (ABS Cooperative Extension) and Agricultural Issues Center
University of California
March 1995 (reprinted)
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A report of research supported by the California Policy Seminar,
University of California

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CALIFORNIA FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE POLICY SERIES

This is the first in an ongoing series of research reports on California’s farmland protection policies and practices. The series is jointly sponsored by the Agricultural Issues Center and the Farmland Policy Project of Cooperative Extension (ABS), both of the University of California. Alvin D. Sokolow serves as general editor of the series.

The following study compares the farmland and open space policies of four Bay Area counties. It was prepared as background to a larger study of policies and programs in a sample of seven Central Valley counties—Fresno, Kern, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tulare, and Yolo. Each Central Valley jurisdiction is a major agriculture county that is undergoing significant population growth leading to the actual or potential conversion of substantial amounts of farmland to urban uses. Findings from the Bay Area research provide a contrast to the practices and experiences of the Central Valley counties.

The research summarized here and in Report 2 was supported by the California Policy Seminar, a joint program of the University of California and California State Government. The final report of the Central Valley study, containing state and local policy recommendations, will be published by the Policy Seminar in 1995. For further information on the research, readers may call the Farmland Policy Project at UC Davis, (916) 752-0979.

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FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION IN THE FOUR NORTH BAY COUNTIES

During the early development of California, farmland in the Bay Area provided food and fiber for a growing population. The farmland in today's North Bay counties supplied food for the miners during the Gold Rush and to San Francisco, a West Coast port and a burgeoning urban center at the end of the transcontinental railroad. However, Bay Area population growth during and following World War II caused major conversion of farmland and open space to urban development. Leapfrog development was common and land use planning at the local government level was limited if it existed at all. Today, land use planning is an important part of local government, and the four North Bay counties—Solano, Napa, Sonoma, and Marin—have managed to preserve some of their farmland and open space despite constant pressure for urban development.

This reviews the programs these counties have developed to maintain land in agriculture and open space. It also examines the general plans, the policies of the Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs), and the political and historical context in which these programs, plans, and policies were created. Part I briefly compares the four counties, and Part II covers each county in more detail. Current developments in farmland and open space protection are mentioned as well, with the clear understanding that land use planning and politics are dynamic and the snapshot taken today may be different tomorrow.

Figure 1: The Four North Bay Counties

The four North Bay counties—Marin, Sonoma, Napa and Solano—are part of the nine county San Francisco Bay Region.
PART I—COUNTY COMPARISONS

The local governments of Napa and Marin counties made commitments to preserve farmland and open space earlier than the governments of Sonoma and Solano counties. Local citizen activities, usually in organized groups, preceded government action, and all counties have met opposition from landowners, developers, and many farmers when adopting protection measures.

Figure 2 compares the land area of the North Bay counties and Figure 3 compares the percent population growth during the decade 1980 to 1990.

**Figure 2: Total Land Area in Square Miles**

![Graph showing land area in square miles for Solano, Napa, Sonoma, and Marin counties.]

Source: 1990 US Census of Population

**POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS**

Conservation-minded citizens in Marin County began the successful quest for more parklands as early as the 1930s and local government policies shifted toward farmland and open space protection in the early 1970s. In Napa County, decisions by local government to protect farmland began in the late 1960s after pressure from local citizens prompted the Board of Supervisors to set aside thousands of acres of Napa’s farmland for an agricultural preserve. In both counties, active local citizens backed county supervisors with “radical” visions of land use, and in both counties, strong opposition to these visions and the ultimate policies was expressed by landowners, developers, and many farmers. Local government policies to protect farmland and open space in Sonoma County were not established until recently—late 1980s and 1990s. Only recently Solano County local governments (both the cities and county) have developed significant policies to save farmland and open space lands between cities. Opposition from landowners, many of them farmers, is still strong.

The original motivation for farmland and open space protection measures in the four counties varied. In Marin County, open space and the environment were key, and initially agriculture was merely a way to keep land in open space. Concern for the agricultural community did not emerge until after farmland and open space protection measures were in place. In Napa and Sonoma counties, farmland protection was emphasized and the continuation of agriculture as a significant aspect of the local economy was a rallying point. Napa was experiencing a rebirth in the grape and wine industry which helped the farmland protection movement, and the open space and slow growth movements that followed emphasized agriculture as a way to maintain the county’s rural character. Sonoma County initially emphasized agriculture, but open space issues have been equally important. Open space provides community separation and thereby contributes to community identity. The desire for a physical separation between the county’s cities in order to maintain community identity is an important motivation behind Solano County’s current movement toward farmland and open space protection.
POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Table I gives an overview of the programs used by the four North Bay counties for achieving farmland and open space protection. These programs vary among the counties.

1. Land Trusts. Land trusts are the only common program to all four counties. Solano and Marin land trusts regularly receive public money while Napa and Sonoma land trusts do not, except for occasional grants involving public money for specific instances. Marin’s land trust (the Marin Agricultural Land Trust or MALT) also receives substantial support from the Buck Fund, a lucrative trust fund left by a Marin family. A right-to-farm ordinance has been passed by the board of supervisors in three of the counties, but Marin has not yet developed one.

2. Open Space Districts. Open space districts for the purpose of purchasing land or easements were approved by the voters of Marin in 1972 and the voters of Sonoma in 1990, but defeated by the voters of Napa in 1992. The issue as a ballot measure has not emerged in Solano County. In Marin and Sonoma, the districts are funded by local tax money; property tax in Marin and sales tax in Sonoma.

3. Ballot Measures. Ballot measures to limit growth or restrict conversion of farmland and open space to urban development occurred in Napa County, one in 1980 and another in 1990, and in Solano County in 1984. These were citizen-motivated measures that developed in reaction to decisions made by existing boards of supervisors.

4. Litigation. Lawsuits have played a role in Solano and Napa counties. A group of Solano County citizens sued the City of Fairfield, but settled on an agreement that established the Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation. In Napa, several groups sued the county, resulting in a strengthened general plan for farmland and open space protection.

5. Joint Powers Agreements. Solano County uses joint powers agreements as a means to preserve farmland and open space. One agreement was created in the 1970s with the Solano Irrigation District and involves the Suisun Valley; another was created this past year among several cities and the county for the purpose of protecting open space. A joint powers agreement in Napa County has allowed the sharing of sales tax money, reducing the county’s need for industrial and commercial development on unincorporated land in order to gain tax money for needed revenue.

GENERAL PLANS

The general plans of all four counties emphasize the contribution agriculture makes to open space, to visual or scenic resources, and to the economy of the county. The Sonoma County General Plan, revised in 1989, is the only general plan with an Agricultural Element, although Marin has a proposed Agricultural Element in its new General Plan pending approval by the Board of Supervisors.

Population growth and the desire to avoid rapid population growth is a concept prevalent in both Marin and Napa general plans. Sonoma mentions carrying capacity and the need to create population growth control measures if growth occurs more rapidly than anticipated. Of the four counties, Solano looks most favorably on population growth, and agriculture is mentioned as a way to hold land until urban development occurs.

Nevertheless, the Solano County General Plan shows a thorough understanding of agricultural issues and conditions affecting or limiting the future health of the agricultural industry. A desire to protect some of the county’s agricultural land is clearly stated. Napa has strong land use goals that favor agricultural land protection, although the General Plan also emphasizes environmental and open space concerns. The Sonoma County General Plan focuses on agriculture. It shows a clear understanding of agricultural issues and gives agriculture preferential treatment, which is consistent throughout the various elements of the General Plan. The Marin Countywide Plan is most concerned with the environment. Although agriculture is viewed favorably, it would fall second in line behind environmental and open space concerns.

LAFCO POLICIES

With regard to annexation of agricultural land to cities or districts, Marin and Napa Counties have the strongest and most specific language in their LAFCO policies. The Marin LAFCO policy encourages infill and forbids annexation of agricultural land to a city or urban service agency. Urban development and the extension of urban services belong in the cities. Napa’s LAFCO policy prohibits annexation of agricultural lands to any district for the extension of urban services and prohibits the extension of urban services outside adopted spheres of influence. Again, urban development belongs in urban areas.

The Sonoma LAFCO policy has been less specific than Marin or Napa policies. It discourages development in areas not designed for urban
Table 1: Farmland and Open Space Preservation Programs in the Four North Bay Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Solano</th>
<th>Napa</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Marin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General plan</td>
<td>Emphasizes urban needs and agriculture</td>
<td>Emphasizes agriculture and open space</td>
<td>Emphasizes agriculture</td>
<td>Emphasizes open space and the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAFCO policy</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>Specific and strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land owned and managed by public agencies (federal, state, and local)*</td>
<td>8 percent of total county area</td>
<td>17 percent of total county area</td>
<td>9 percent of total county area</td>
<td>43 percent of total county area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique resource protection (created by California legislature or voters)</td>
<td>Suisun Marsh Preservation Act and Delta Protection Act</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>California Coastal Act</td>
<td>California Coastal Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open space district (purchase land title or easements)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes—funded by sales tax</td>
<td>Yes—funded by property tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land trust (purchase or accept donations of land title or easements)</td>
<td>Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation</td>
<td>Napa County Land Trust</td>
<td>Sonoma Land Trust</td>
<td>Marin Agricultural Land Trust—MALT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of development rights</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint powers agreement</td>
<td>1) Limits infrastructure expansion</td>
<td>Shared sales tax</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Created the Countywide Planning Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countywide ballot measure to limit growth or development</td>
<td>Yes (Measure A)</td>
<td>Yes (Measure A and Measure J)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-to-farm ordinance</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countywide marketing program for agricultural products</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (SCAMP)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County ordinance limiting agricultural processing facilities on agricultural lands</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Winery Ordinance</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


devolution by applicable plans and encourages urban development in cities rather than the unincorporated areas. More concise language was added recently, however, when Sonoma County adopted a LAFCO policy that prohibits city annexation of land within a community separator. This is the result of increased concern over maintaining physical separation (open space) between communities in order to maintain community identity.

Solano County's LAFCO policy is the most general of the four counties. It acknowledges the need to infill or develop within urban areas before annexing more land or extending urban services, but it outlines many reasons for not infilling and many conditions that lead to the need for annexation. It appears this LAFCO policy is more concerned with justifying the reasons for urban development and the need for city annexations and growth than stating the conditions under which annexations and urban service extensions are prohibited.

The LAFCO policies of the four counties could explain why more city annexation activity has occurred in recent years in Sonoma and Solano counties than in Marin and Napa counties. In addition, expanding city limits in Sonoma and Solano counties during the past couple of decades could explain the recent concern with community identity and open space between cities.
PART II—COUNTY PROFILES

Part II covers the details for Solano, Napa, Sonoma, and Marin counties. Each county is examined separately in terms of four topics: (1) Farmland and Open Space Programs, (2) the General Plan, (3) the policies of the Local Agency Formation Commission, and (4) Historical Context and Current Developments. The Farmland and Open Space Programs section covers programs that go beyond the conventional planning and land use programs of General Plans, zoning, and LAFCO policies. Tables 2, 4, 6, and 8 give an overview of the programs in Solano, Napa, Sonoma, and Marin counties, respectively, and each table covers the date the programs were enacted, their purpose, effects, and origin. The Historical Context and Current Developments section in each county profile includes the historical and political context leading to farmland and open space protection along with current issues. Tables 3, 5, 7, and 9 list the incorporated communities of each county and the population of these communities and the unincorporated areas.

SOLANO COUNTY

Although one farmland preservation program in Solano County began in the 1970s, it wasn’t until the next decade that citizen groups played a key role in implementing farmland and open space preservation programs. During this same decade, Solano County experienced the most rapid population growth of all the Bay Area counties. Despite the continued growth pressures from Sacramento and the Bay Area, agriculture maintains an important role in this county, with a total production value in the 1992 crop year of $166 million.

Solano is a Bay Area county, a Delta county, and a Sacramento Valley county. Like most Central Valley counties, water is an issue. Rainfall is not as abundant in this county as it is in the other North Bay counties, making Solano a net importer of water through state and federal projects.

Solano’s water picture, agricultural competition from other Central Valley counties, and the lack of higher-priced Bay Area specialty crops contribute to the discussions of agriculture’s economic viability and its future in this county. Although the farming community is split in its commitment to farmland preservation, the urban communities are placing more emphasis on farmland preservation as a way to preserve the county’s rural character and the open spaces between communities.

FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE PROGRAMS

Table 2 gives an overview of the programs enacted in Solano County for the preservation of farmland and open space. These programs are discussed in more detail below.

Solano Irrigation District Agreement With the City of Fairfield and Solano County (1974)

As a key participant in the Solano Project, the Solano Irrigation District (SID) delivers water from Monticello Dam at Lake Berryessa, originally constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation. Although most of its water deliveries are for agriculture, approximately ten percent of its water distribution is for municipal and industrial use. A water agreement among SID, the city of Fairfield, and the Solano County Water Conservation and Flood Control District involves an exchange of Lake Berryessa water for up to 6,000 acre-feet annually of Fairfield’s reclaimed, tertiary-treated water. Part of the agreement involves keeping land in agriculture.

According to the written contract, the city will not provide urban services to Suisun Valley without exacting heavy penalties. Although this contract expires in 2005, the Fairfield General Plan reflects this agreement in that Suisun Valley is not destined for urban expansion. SID has an interest in maintaining a strong agricultural economy in its coverage area, which includes most of the county’s farmland because agricultural water users pay most of the District’s financial obligations for retiring the construction debt and maintaining the extensive water distribution system. According to SID, it is committed to longterm agriculture in the Suisun Valley because prime farmland creates additional assurance that farming will remain economically viable.

Suisun Marsh Preservation Act of 1977

Passed by the California Legislature, this Act serves to protect the Suisun Marsh in southern Solano County by adopting provisions of a protection plan prepared by the Bay Conservation and Development Commission. The Preservation Act requires local
Table 2: Land Use Programs in Solano County for the Preservation of Farmland and Open Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Year Enacted)</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1974)</td>
<td>Solano Irrigation District agreement with city and county</td>
<td>Limit infrastructure expansion as part of a water exchange program</td>
<td>Restricts urban services from Suisun Valley</td>
<td>Joint powers agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1977)</td>
<td>Suisun Marsh Preservation Act</td>
<td>Protect a unique resource</td>
<td>Restricts development in primary and secondary management areas of the Suisun Marsh</td>
<td>California Legislature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1986)</td>
<td>Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation</td>
<td>Purchase open space easements and/or land title</td>
<td>Preserves farmland threatened by urbanization and provides open space buffers between cities</td>
<td>Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1987)</td>
<td>Right-to-Farm Ordinance (notice to purchaser of real property)</td>
<td>Protect agriculture from nuisance complaints</td>
<td>Requires notification to property owner after purchase of property</td>
<td>Board of Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1992)</td>
<td>Delta Protection Act</td>
<td>Protect a unique resource</td>
<td>Develops a comprehensive resource management plan by 1994 that preserves the Delta’s agriculture, recreation, and wildlife habitat</td>
<td>California Legislature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1992)</td>
<td>Tri-Cities and County Regional Park and Open Space Authority</td>
<td>Acquire open space</td>
<td>Provides permanent community separators between Benicia, Vallejo, and Fairfield</td>
<td>Joint powers agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Governments and districts having jurisdiction over the marsh to prepare a Local Protection Program for the marsh that was consistent with the provisions of the Act. Solano County has jurisdiction over the marsh and the county’s General Plan was amended to reflect the intent of the Act. The result is limited use of the land to marsh-oriented recreation uses and limited agriculture, although some pre-existing uses are grandfathered. The Primary Management Area is mostly tidal marshes, wetlands, and lowland grasslands, with very limited agriculture allowed in order to protect water quality and wildlife and vegetation habitat. The Secondary Management Area contains upland grasslands and cultivated lands. It allows limited extensive agricultural use involving grazing and grain production and serves as a significant buffer between the primary marsh area and urban development. The Suisun Marsh contains approximately 84,000 acres of tidal marsh, managed wetlands, and waterways. Because many landowners in this area are duck clubs, they encouraged the State Legislature to enact this preservation measure. Through an act of the Legislature, however, some land in Suisun City south of Highway 12 was taken out of the protection zone to allow residential development.

Measure A (1984)

Voters barely passed this initiative in June 1984 in response to the county’s rezoning of large agricultural parcels to urban development. Rancho Solano and Manzanita New Town were two developments opposed by a group of Solano County residents who eventually formed the Orderly Growth Committee. They accused the county of approving leapfrog development and avoiding the General Plan policy of urban-centered growth. Measure A was designed to prohibit New Town or large scale residential development in the unincorporated area outside of urban growth areas through 1995 by redrafting the Land Use and Circulation Element Map of the General Plan. The Agriculture and Open Space designations as shown on the 1980 General Plan Map must remain through 1995 unless the land is annexed, incorporated, redesignated by a vote of the people, or...
the Board of Supervisors can show the land meets five findings outlined in the measure. This measure expires on December 31, 1995, but talk of renewing this measure by another vote of the people has already begun.

**Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation (1986)**

This Land Trust, a private, non-profit corporation, receives public money to accomplish two basic goals: (1) preserve key agricultural lands in Solano County, especially those threatened by urbanization, and (2) preserve open space buffers between cities. The Foundation was established in 1986 as a result of litigation. The intent of the earlier Measure A to prevent leapfrog development in the unincorporated areas of the county was circumvented by the City of Fairfield through its annexation of additional lands that were not included in the comprehensive annexation plans of the city and while considerable land already existed for development within the city limits. The Orderly Growth Committee, an unincorporated group of individuals responsible for Measure A, sued the city, but accepted a settlement agreement that included a provision requiring Fairfield to establish and fund a non-profit organization to foster open space objectives. Approximately half the annual revenue of the Foundation ($50,000) comes from a Mello-Roos District, a special tax district with bonding authority established under the settlement. The revenues will increase as development continues within the Mello-Roos District, with a potential to reach $300,000 annually for the Foundation. For acquisitions of both land and easements, the Foundation relies primarily on grant money from numerous sources—federal, state, and private. To date, 2,800 acres are owned or under conservation easements by the Foundation.

**Right-To-Farm Ordinance (Notice to Purchaser of Real Property) (1987)**

Chapter 2A of the Solano County Code states that “properly conducted agricultural operations will not be deemed a nuisance….” After property has been purchased and with the recording of every deed, the Solano County Assessor’s Office sends a “Notice to Purchaser of Real Property” to notify the new property owner of this provision in the County Code. The notice further explains that possible inconvenience or discomfort from agricultural operations may arise and that they are a “necessary aspect of living in a county with a strong rural character and a healthy agricultural sector.” The one-page notice is printed on Solano County Department of Agriculture letterhead.

**The Delta Protection Act (1992)**

Sponsored by Senator Patrick Johnston, this state legislation was passed in September 1992 and will affect approximately ten percent of the land in Solano County. The land affected is on the county’s east border and includes Ryer Island and Hastings Tract. The Act addresses land use, not water, and divides the Delta into a primary zone and a secondary zone. The primary zone, which is 66 percent of the land area of the statutory Delta, is to remain in its current agricultural and wetlands state. A 19 member Delta Protection Commission, including one representative from the Board of Supervisors in each of the five Delta counties, is to develop a comprehensive resource management plan for the primary area of the Delta by July 1994. The Solano County General Plan, along with the general plans of the remaining four counties, must be revised to reflect this resource management plan and be approved by the new commission. The resource management plan, or regional plan, is to emphasize the Delta’s traditional values of agriculture, recreation, and wildlife habitat, and must provide for “the preservation and protection of agriculture.” Originally, the counties, including Solano, were skeptical of this measure because of the loss of local control. This was the only regional growth management bill passed by the California Legislature and signed by the Governor in 1992.

**Joint Powers Agreements**

The Tri-Cities and County Regional Park and Open Space Authority was established in Spring 1992 by a joint powers agreement among the cities of Vallejo, Benicia, Fairfield, and the County of Solano in an attempt to preserve 10,000 acres of open space inside the triangle formed by the three cities. With the help of the Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation, half of the 1,039 acres in Lynch Canyon southwest of Fairfield was purchased for open space with the remainder scheduled for purchase in 1994 for a total price of $4.2 million. Lynch Canyon was once targeted as a dumpsite for San Francisco garbage, but Solano County voters rejected the idea in 1983. Seven subdivisions have been proposed by developers since then, but water and city sewer services are lacking. The purpose of preserving the entire 10,000 acres in open space is to help each city maintain its identity, with distinct physical separation between each.

The Travis Area Planning Authority (TAPA) was established by a joint powers agreement between the cities of Suisun and Fairfield to determine the land uses north of Highway 12, southeast of Fairfield. Growth from Suisun City could easily spread to this area, except that current plans are to keep this area
free from urban development so that Travis Air Force Base can continue operations, surrounded by sufficient open space. Much of the land is used for grazing.

Vacaville and Fairfield have been discussing plans for a greenbelt since May 1989. The greenbelt would act as a buffer between the cities, and both cities have adopted greenbelt measures in their General Plans. Work on establishing an agreement between the cities to purchase easements or title to land within the 7,000-acre buffer has been difficult due to resistance by landowners in the area.

GENERAL PLAN

According to the Solano County General Plan, agriculture is important and benefits the county in the following ways:

• provides jobs;
• contributes to the local economy;
• maintains important open space by:
  a) enhancing visual corridors;
  b) providing physical separation between urban communities; and
• provides a practical way to “hold” land until development.

Two documents of the Solano County General Plan were used for this study: the Solano County Land Use and Circulation Element and the Resource Conservation and Open Space Plan (Phase 2).

In the Land Use and Circulation Element six major goals are listed. Neither agriculture nor open space is mentioned specifically, but the second goal comes closest to including these by mentioning the need to maintain and enhance environmental quality through the management and preservation of the diverse natural resources.

The objective listed in the agricultural lands section of the chapter on Agriculture and Open Space Lands is to preserve the county’s high quality soils and protect and maintain essential agricultural lands, including areas which possess unique characteristics for the raising of specialty crops. In this section the plan lists some of the problems farmers face when urban or rural development begins to move onto farmland. In addition, it recognizes that the division of farmland into smaller parcels can lead to homesite development and eventual removal of land from the agricultural economy. It specifically notes that 20- to 40-acre homesites can be harmful in extensive agricultural areas.

Three ways to keep land in agriculture are also outlined in this section: (1) maintain adequate parcel sizes for farmland units (Note: a farmland unit is not necessarily an “economic unit,” that is, a unit which would totally support a farm household, but rather it is defined as the size parcel a farmer would consider leasing or purchasing for different agricultural purposes); (2) protect ag land from urbanization, that is, Urban Growth Lines must be established and speculation pressures eliminated, which is achieved already on lands under Williamson Act contracts; and (3) prevent conflicting land uses from occurring in essential agricultural areas.

Agricultural lands are classified into two categories: intensive agriculture, which includes high quality soils under irrigation, and extensive agriculture, which includes agricultural lands with lower quality soils used for dryland farming and rangeland.

Agricultural land is further categorized into essential and non-essential lands. All intensive agriculture land is deemed essential and worthy of protection from urban encroachment. The extensive agricultural land, however, may be essential or non-essential. The General Plan purposely does not define criteria for rating extensive land essential or non-essential, stating that it would be inadequate to develop a rating system of factors to determine whether an area is essential.

The minimum parcel size for intensive/essential land is 80 acres, unless the landowner can demonstrate that the land is highly productive (especially vineyard and orchard land), in which case the minimum parcel size can be reduced to 40 acres. The minimum parcel size for extensive/essential land is 160 acres, while extensive/non-essential land may be as small as 20 acres.

Non-essential agricultural lands are to remain in agriculture during the time frame of the General Plan, with the recognition that they may be converted to non-agricultural uses later. Non-agricultural uses include rural ranchettes. In addition, the non-essential lands are valued as productive open space lands, particularly if these lands would pose safety hazards if developed (e.g., Travis Air Force Base flight approach, areas of unstable soils or high grassfire risk). Watershed areas and community buffers are recognized as potential non-essential agricultural lands, but any non-essential extensive agricultural lands that have potential for future development are encouraged to remain in agriculture until conversion to other uses is necessary.

The Watershed Lands, Marsh and Wetland Habitat section and the Visual Corridors section in the Agriculture and Open Space Land Use Chapter also mention agriculture. The watershed lands, which
include the hills and mountains in the western portion of the county, have lower quality soils and are to remain in extensive agricultural use. Only agricultural activities that are compatible with the marsh environment are allowed in the marsh areas. Grazing lands and intensive agricultural land provide important buffers between communities and enhance the visual corridors along transportation routes. In this context, agriculture’s value is open space.

The General Plan Map shows county-designated urban growth lines, which are based on the adopted general plans of the cities. It appears these lines are to remain in place for the lifetime of the General Plan. Lands outside the urban growth lines are to remain in agriculture or rural uses and lands inside the urban growth lines are slated for development, but in an orderly manner, with annexation by the cities to occur before the extension of urban services. The county’s policy is to encourage phased development of lands within the urban growth lines, beginning with land immediately adjacent to cities.

Fifteen Development Strategy policies are listed, and agriculture is specifically mentioned in two of them. Concepts from these policies that directly affect agricultural land are listed below:

• Confine urban development so essential agricultural land is retained.
• Confine rural and suburban development so only marginal agricultural lands are affected.
• Confine rural and suburban development to minimize conflict with agriculture.
• Prevent urban development in the unincorporated area.
• Maintain urban growth lines.
• Define community buffers using “productive open space” so cities can maintain their community identities.

The farmers’ ability to remain economically viable is mentioned several times in the General Plan, with one reference to the severe competition the growers of Solano County feel from other agricultural areas outside the county. Wildlife habitat, vegetation preservation, and recreation opportunities are listed as important open space benefits the county provides for urban populations. Agriculture is mentioned as a potential land source for public recreation.

The Land Use and Circulation Element was adopted December 1980 with subsequent amendments enacted through August 1992. It is intended to provide policy guidance to the county until 1995. Although the initial goals in the Land Use and Circulation Element are directed more to urban issues and orderly growth than to resource protection, including agriculture, the document clearly recognizes the importance of agriculture for the local economy and for its open space value, particularly community separators.

A contradiction exists in this General Plan, however, in regard to urban uses in the unincorporated area. The Development Strategy Policies state that the unincorporated area shall not be developed with urban uses, but the Planning Framework Chapter mentions the county’s responsibility to provide unique industrial opportunities and rural residential housing, and the agricultural lands section of the Agriculture and Open Space Land Use Chapter describes non-essential lands as potential sites for rural ranchettes and unique industries in the unincorporated areas. Rural residential housing (rural ranchettes) and unique industries are urban uses potentially destined for the unincorporated area, which appears to conflict with the Development Strategy Policies.

The Conservation and Open Space Plan was originally adopted in 1973 and amended in 1981. Phase 2 was specifically designed to address agricultural issues. This document was prepared with the assistance of a Citizens Open Space Advisory Committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors in 1972. Appendix B of this document contains the report and recommendations from the Advisory Committee to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. Several issues in this report are worth noting:

• concern over public access to private property without the property owner’s consent;
• advocacy of additional uses (besides agriculture) on watershed lands that are compatible with watershed use of the land;
• suggestions for estate-type residential development and for urban-industrial reserve on agricultural land;
• recommendation for review every two years of part of the Suisun Valley to determine if it should be permanently retained in agriculture; and
• concern over the use permit process, with the suggestion that a minimum amount of paperwork should be necessary for a landowner who decides to “use his property.”

It appears that the committee was concerned more with the ability of property owners to maintain their options for development than with the county’s ability to establish clear land use designations to protect agriculture.
LAFCO POLICY

Six mandatory standards and five discretionary standards are outlined in the Solano County LAFCO Annexation Standards and Procedures of May 1987. The six mandatory standards are (1) consistency with Sphere of Influence boundaries; (2) annexation to the limits of the Sphere of Influence boundaries; (3) consistency with appropriate general plan, specific plan, area-wide plan and zoning ordinance; (4) consistency with the county general plan of proposed reorganization outside of a city’s sphere of influence boundary; (5) a requirement for pre-approval; and (6) a description of the effect on natural resources. The five discretionary standards involve (1) the relationship to established boundaries, streets, roads, assessment lines, proximity to other populated areas, assessed valuation, and remaining unincorporated territory; (2) the likelihood of significant growth and effect on other incorporated or unincorporated territory; (3) protection of prime agricultural land; (4) the provision and cost of community services; and (5) the effect of the proposed action on adjacent areas, mutual social and economic interest, and on local governmental structure.

The explanation under each discretionary standard includes related factors LAFCO needs to consider. A Comprehensive Annexation Plan (CAP) is required for cities with a ten-year supply of vacant developable land so an analysis of the proposal and its relationship to the CAP can be made. A city's CAP must identify prime land within the city's Sphere of Influence. A market analysis is required for proposals of 40 acres or more for multi-family residential, commercial, and industrial properties and 100 acres or more for single family residential properties. The purpose of the market evaluation is to justify the annexation by showing that an unmet demand exists for the proposed urban land use.

A list of criteria explains whether land can be judged prime land. Class I and Class II soils, rating 80 through 100 in the Storie Index Rating, and locally important lands are mentioned, with the suggestion that an economic analysis be completed. Annexation promotes the “planned orderly and efficient development” of an area when insufficient vacant non-prime lands exist within city boundaries. Further explanation describes “insufficient lands” (for development) as land not available at a reasonable market rate. Furthermore, the document states that the second part of the standard is permissive, in that it encourages rather than mandates the development of vacant or nonprime land already within the agency limit before pushing outward into unincorporated territory.

Maintaining the integrity of agricultural lands is described as avoiding premature pressure for the conversion of such lands to urban use. While this document acknowledges the need for infill on vacant lands before extending into agricultural areas, it also suggests that a “reasoned assessment” of this concept occurs when any one of the following conditions exist:

- owners of infill property are not willing to sell at a fair market rate;
- too many lots for single-family housing exist when the market demands other kinds of housing;
- available property is too small in an area to accommodate long-term building objectives of the developer;
- surrounding land use may be incompatible with the proposal;
- surrounding older housing reflects a deteriorating environment; and
- established single-family areas object to higher densities often necessary to justify infill investment.

It is clear that with these guidelines as a “reasoned assessment,” a developer or agency can avoid infill with many reasons to justify it.

Overall, the Solano County LAFCO policies are substantive, but limited in protecting agricultural land from urbanization.

HISTORICAL AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Solano County has a unique resource, the Suisun Marsh, which provides more than 84,000 acres of habitat for fish and wildlife. It is the largest remaining wetland in the Bay Area and includes more than ten percent of California’s remaining wetlands, providing a major winter habitat for waterfowl along the Pacific Flyway. Consequently, Solano County has a reputation as a waterfowl hunting area. The Grizzly Island Preserve, a 12,300-acre hiking and hunting area in Suisun Marsh and owned by the California Department of Fish and Game, is the largest single area of public land in this county.

Solano County is one of the nine Bay Area counties because its southwest border includes San Pablo Bay. Solano's south and east edges are part of the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta along the Sacramento River and related sloughs, and a significant part of the county extends into the Sacramento Valley. Therefore, Solano County is a Bay Area county, a Delta county, and a Central Valley county.
Major transportation routes cross the county, and five of the seven cities are bisected by Interstate 80 or Interstate 680. The Solano County General Plan recognizes the county’s rapid population growth since the 1940s and attributes it to these major transportation routes, moderate housing costs, and growing employment from major military installations. Despite policies in the Solano County General Plan regarding urban growth lines, both the cities and LAFCO seem to have ignored these during the past decade, when major annexations by the cities took place.

Solano County continues to be an accessible bedroom community for many people employed in the metropolitan Bay Area. By 1991 the total population of Solano County was 352,257. According to 1992 ABAG projections, the County will have a population of 524,000 by the year 2005. This 49 percent increase is the greatest percentage increase of any county in the nine-county Bay Area. Table 3 lists the incorporated communities in Solano County and the 1990 population of these communities and the unincorporated area.

The City of Fairfield General Plan shows a doubling of its population over the next twenty years. Assessments will be charged to developers to help the city (through the Farmlands and Open Space Foundation) purchase easements on land surrounding the city, creating a greenbelt that will signify the ultimate city boundary. The smaller cities of Solano County continue to plan for more growth, too. Rio Vista has a population of 3400, but annexation of over a thousand acres, development approvals for 7500 new homes, and an expected population of 28,000 at full build-out are part of its plan.

Agriculture surrounding this community on the Sacramento River includes crops from the Delta, grazing, and grain.

Solano County agriculture ranks 28 (economic value) among the 58 counties in the state. It ranks second in corn production (grain); second in sheep and lambs; third in wheat (grain); fourth in pears, sugar beets, and tomatoes; and fifth in barley. Clearly, Solano County contributes to the total picture of California agriculture.

Areas capable of agricultural production are spread throughout the county and include Class I and II soils and prime grazing land. The Solano County General Plan acknowledges the statewide trend toward environmental awareness in the 1970s and credits this trend with the increased protection of both natural and agricultural resources in the 1980 General Plan.

But the farming community in Solano County is divided on its attitude toward farmland protection. Some farmers told the Solano Irrigation District during negotiations for farmland protection in 1974 and in more recent discussions that the District should confine its activities to water delivery, while others said the District should be doing more to protect agricultural land. Many Solano County farmers want the option to sell their land for urban development.

This attitude is clear in recent discussions on open space protection. Members of the Citizens Advisory Group for the Tri-Cities and County Regional Park Open Space Authority included ranchers and landowners in the area within the triangle (Benicia, Vallejo, and Fairfield). The landowners complained about “taking away our zoning” and removing the option to develop the land, if not now, in the future for their children or grandchildren. Cattle ranchers explained that if Lynch Canyon becomes a regional park, park visitors will interfere with ranching operations and increased vandalism would result.

Nevertheless, other farmers and ranchers want increased farmland protection and long-term commitments from the cities and county. Recently, the Solano County Farm Bureau Board of Directors approved their own land use policy that includes goals for protecting farmland from urban development.

In addition, farmers near Rio Vista recently fought the development of a major transportation route through the county. Outside investors proposed a toll road from Suisun to Vacaville that would link San Jose to Sacramento. It would have crossed the Montezuma Hills, an area known for some of the most productive dryland farming in the state. With the assistance of the Greenbelt Alliance, local farmers successfully killed the proposal for the immediate future.

Future land use issues will involve an update of the General Plan, developer fees, and more conservation easements. The Solano County Department of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorporated Cities</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benicia</td>
<td>25,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dixon</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfield</td>
<td>60,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Vista</td>
<td>3,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suisun City</td>
<td>21,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacaville</td>
<td>70,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vallejo</td>
<td>107,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unincorporated Area</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>339,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Environmental Management hopes to update the General Plan prior to Measure A expiring in December 1995. Proponents of the measure indicate they will try to renew it in another election even though they will work with the Board of Supervisors on the General Plan update. Some discussions are occurring regarding a special fee for development within the cities that would automatically go to the county to help with capital improvement expenditures. This would reduce the county’s need for industrial and commercial development, and it would encourage urban uses in urban areas. Tax sharing between the cities and county has been discussed, but to date no agreement exists. In addition, the county and the California Department of Fish and Game are discussing a Habitat Preservation Plan for the Swainson’s Hawk, which would involve the purchase of conservation easements.
NAPA COUNTY

Napa County was destined to become a bedroom community to San Francisco until citizen involvement in the 1960s questioned this assumption. Active citizen participation continues to this day and Napa County has earned a reputation for strong land use programs and a general plan that protects agriculture and open space. Although many people argue that Napa’s world renowned grape and wine industry provides an easy incentive to protect farmland, others point out that without strong farmland protection, a revival of the industry would not have been possible.

Napa County had a total agricultural production value of $174 million in the 1992 crop year. Grapes account for more than 96 percent of this total and contribute to Napa County’s strong agricultural base.

FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE PROGRAMS

Table 4 gives an overview of the programs enacted in Napa County for the preservation of farmland and open space. These programs are discussed in more detail below.

The Agricultural Preserve (1968)

Prior to the adoption of the current Land Use Element of the General Plan, the Board of Supervisors created the agricultural preserve and raised the minimum parcel size from one acre to 20 acres. (In 1978 the minimum parcel size was raised to 40 acres.) The agricultural preserve concept was briefly discussed in Napa prior to the passage of the Williamson Act in 1965 which provided property tax reduction for farmland located within preserves. Napa’s agricultural preserve, created in 1968, involved a broad-based designation of the county’s entire valley, making agriculture the primary use allowed on the land. During the public hearings before the Board of Supervisors, some farmers argued that increased population growth and urban expansion made agricultural zoning necessary if farming were to survive in Napa County, but others argued that an agricultural preserve would devalue their property and put them out of business, leading to the ultimate death of agriculture in the county. The board voted 5–0 in favor of the program.

Napa County Land Trust (1976)

Founded in 1976, this non profit group has a board of trustees and paid staff who work with landowners to permanently protect land from subdivision and development. The Trust is funded by membership dues and donations. The goal of the Land Trust is to preserve land in its natural or agricultural state in perpetuity. The Land Trust accepts donations of both land and conservation easements. With the latter, land is kept in private ownership but subject to deed restrictions that limit development. Land owners participating in this program are eligible for estate and income tax benefits that are significant enough to help those wanting to keep their land in longterm agriculture or open space. More than 8,000 acres involving 34 landowners are now owned or under easement contracts with the Napa County Land Trust. The parcels are distributed throughout the county.

Napa County Slow Growth Initiative—Measure A (1980)

Napa County voters passed Measure A in November 1980 as the result of a slow-growth movement with strong support from residents within the City of Napa. The Initiative required the Board of Supervisors to adopt a Growth Management System Element in the Napa County General Plan that would enact both standards of the initiative. The first standard limits the annual number of new housing units permitted in the unincorporated area of the county through the year 2000. The limit is linked to the population growth of the nine Bay Area counties with a maximum annual one percent growth rate. (U.S. Census data on the number of persons per household are used to calculate the number of dwelling units for the one percent limit.) The second standard requires at least 15 percent of the annual allowable number of housing permits to be available for housing that will be purchased or rented by persons with average or below average income.

Winery Ordinance (1990)

Since the enactment of this ordinance in January 1990, all wineries locating in the agricultural zones of Napa County have been subject to the "75 percent rule"—at least 75 percent of the grapes used to make the winery’s product must be grown within the county. Existing wineries requesting a permit to expand gallonage capacity must use grapes grown in Napa County for at least 75 percent of the proposed expansion. In addition, coverage of the ground with winery facilities (e.g., impervious surfaces, offices, laboratories, storage, and crushing facilities) must not exceed 25 percent of the parcel or 15 acres, whichever is less. The smallest parcel a winery can locate on is ten acres. In addition, tours and tastings, marketing of wine, and accessory uses of a winery are defined.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Enacted</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1968)</td>
<td>Ag Preserve</td>
<td>Limit use of land to agriculture</td>
<td>Reduces urbanization of agricultural lands</td>
<td>Board of Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1976)</td>
<td>Napa County Land Trust</td>
<td>Accept donations of conservation easements or land title</td>
<td>Preserves land in its natural or agricultural state in perpetuity</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1980)</td>
<td>Measure A (Slow Growth Initiative)</td>
<td>Restrict residential development</td>
<td>Limits the number of residential units in the unincorporated area to accommodate no more than 1 percent annual population growth</td>
<td>Countywide ballot measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1990)</td>
<td>Winery Ordinance</td>
<td>Define allowable agricultural processing facilities on agricultural land</td>
<td>Maintains integrity of agricultural lands by partially limiting winery marketing activities and processing to locally-grown grapes</td>
<td>Board of Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1990)</td>
<td>Right-to-Farm Ordinance</td>
<td>Protect agriculture from nuisance complaints</td>
<td>Requires one-time notification to property owners and notification to potential buyers during transfer of real property title</td>
<td>Board of Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1990)</td>
<td>Measure J (Agricultural Land Preservation Initiative)</td>
<td>Prevent conversion of agricultural land to other uses</td>
<td>Retains land designated agriculture in the existing General Plan until 2020, except by a popular vote</td>
<td>Countywide ballot measure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Winery Ordinance was the result of many years of debate among grape growers, vintners, and the county planning staff, with numerous public hearings. Arguments against the ordinance stressed the need to keep government and more regulation out of the winemaking business, Napa’s most notable industry. Arguments for the ordinance stressed the need to protect the integrity of the county’s agricultural land. A record number of wineries were established in the 1970s and 1980s (over 200 bonded wineries existed at the time the ordinance was passed). Many wineries were tourist attractions with activities that involved more than winemaking. Public concern arose over increased traffic and large new buildings on the valley’s agricultural lands. In addition, the volume of grapes grown outside the county, but crushed at facilities inside the county, had increased. Winery Ordinance advocates argued that all these conditions were contrary to General Plan goals.

Right-to-Farm Ordinance (1990)

This ordinance requires a one-time notification of all property owners in Napa County of the importance of agriculture and that inconveniences and discomforts arising from agricultural operations will not be considered a nuisance. The notification was mailed with the annual property tax bill following the creation of the ordinance. For new property transactions, the ordinance requires that a potential buyer sign a statement acknowledging that he/she has read and understands the Right-to-Farm Notice.

**Measure J—The Agricultural Lands Preservation Initiative (1990)**

This voter initiative was approved by a wide margin and in every precinct. It is also known as the 2020 Initiative because it prohibits conversion of land designated “Agriculture, Watershed and Open Space” or “Agricultural Resource” in the General Plan to any other designation until December 31, 2020, unless voters countywide allow such a conversion or the Board of Supervisors make six specific findings:

- annexation to a city or incorporation of the land is not likely;
- the land is immediately adjacent to areas developed in a manner comparable to the proposed use;
adequate public services and facilities are available and have the capability to accommodate the proposed use by virtue of location within or annexation to appropriate service districts;

the proposed use is compatible with agricultural uses, does not interfere with accepted agricultural practices, and does not adversely affect the stability of land use patterns in the area;

the land has not been used for agricultural purposes in the past two years and is unusable for agriculture due to its topography, drainage, flooding, adverse soil conditions or other reasons; and

the land proposed for redesignation does not exceed 40 acres for any one landowner in any calendar year, and one landowner may not obtain redesignation in the general plan to a land use designation other than agriculture more often than every other year.

The initiative's purpose is to ensure that lands are not prematurely or unnecessarily converted to non-agricultural or non-open space uses. A small group of county residents sought legal advice to help them design the initiative, which ultimately gained support from numerous local organizations. Business interests, including the Napa Chamber of Commerce, opposed the initiative.

Challenged by opponents as an inappropriate use of the initiative, Measure J is currently in litigation.

GENERAL PLAN

Among the general goals of the Napa County General Plan is the intent to preserve agriculture and concentrate urban uses in existing urban areas. Agriculture is recognized for its contribution to the following Napa County characteristics:

- lifestyle;
- stable economy:
  a) as a major employer (both direct and indirect);
  b) with a high-value crop;
  c) with taxable land needing few services;
- physical attractiveness; and
- open space.

Land Use Element

The Land Use Element is designed to meet the county's needs to the year 2000. Initially, open space and agriculture are treated as separate issues. Open space is recognized as a use to preserve nature and allow resource production, while agriculture is recognized as a use that is vital to the county's economy and lifestyle.

The five goals of the Land Use Element are summarized below:

- Plan for agriculture as the primary land use in Napa County and concentrate urban uses in the existing cities and urban areas.
- Develop and implement planning policies that define population size, population growth rate, and the geographic distribution of the population so that the desired quality of life is achieved.
- Take advantage of the land's natural capabilities and minimize human conflict with the natural environment.
- Work with cities, citizens, and the private sector to plan for services, urban uses, open space, and other total county needs.
- Implement the General Plan to:
  a) ensure long term protection and integrity of those areas identified as agricultural, open space, or undevelopable; and
  b) stimulate development of areas identified for residential, commercial, and industrial use.

The policies supporting these goals address several issues and these issues are grouped under two headings: Open Space and Watershed and Agriculture. Agriculture is included as a resource, however, in the Open Space and Watershed section.

Agricultural planning policies include the following:

- Enact and enforce regulations that will retain agriculture as a major source of income and employment in Napa County.
- Evaluate permanent land use protection controls and increase the types of Agricultural Preserves so that more land can be included.
- Promote an agricultural support system, including physical components such as farmlabor housing.
- Minimize conflicts from urban uses.
- Design agricultural zoning to establish minimum parcel sizes that reflect the availability of natural resources and to assure that agricultural areas can be maintained as economic units.
- Protect agricultural lands used for grazing even though they are not considered prime soils.
• Reserve prime agricultural land for agricultural use.

• Define agriculture as the production of food and fiber, the growing of crops, produce, and feed and the raising of livestock and animals, and define the processing of agricultural products as an industrial process that requires the same kind of regulations as other industrial uses.

• Protect the right of agricultural operators in designated agricultural areas to continue their practices (right-to-farm).

• Wineries and related activities, where practical, will be located on sites void of prime soils.

"Urbanizing" is described as the subdivision, use, or development of any parcel of land that is not needed for the agricultural use of that parcel. Tourist facilities cannot conflict with agriculture and a need for these facilities must be documented and only when no city or urban alternative is planned. Furthermore, the county will direct non-agricultural industry away from productive agricultural lands.

The two land use classifications pertaining to agriculture are Agriculture, Watershed and Open Space (AWOS) and Agricultural Resources (AR). AWOS includes land where the predominant use is agriculture and where watershed areas and other natural constraints make land unsuitable for urban development for a variety of reasons. The minimum parcel size is 40 to 160 acres, depending upon physical constraints. AR includes land in the fertile areas of the county where agriculture should continue to be the dominate land use and where urban uses would be detrimental to the continuance of agriculture and to the maintenance of open space. Minimum parcel size is 40 acres.

Growth Management System

This Element was enacted as a direct result of Measure A in 1980. It was adopted in August 1981 and amended in December 1991, using the 1990 Census to update the figures as required. When voters approved the Measure A slow growth initiative, the Board of Supervisors was required to enact a system for handling the growth objectives of the initiative until the year 2000. The Growth Management System Element creates categories of residential building permits for the unincorporated area of the county and allocates an annual number of permits to be allowed under each category. The Board of Supervisors has discretion to transfer any unused allocation from one category to another, including additions to but not subtraction from the affordable housing category. Unused allocations may be carried over into the following year, but only for one year. When the demand for permits exceeds the allowed allocation, a lottery system will decide who receives the permits. To date, no lottery has been necessary. In addition, the number of permit applications for the affordable housing category has never reached the allowed allocation. The total annual allocation of building permits is divided among these categories, but Measure A requires that at least 15 percent of the annual housing permits be available for housing capable of purchase or rental by persons with average or below average income (affordable housing). The annual allocation cannot exceed the number of units needed to accommodate the annual growth rate of the nine Bay Area counties or one percent, whichever is less. Loss of irreplaceable agricultural land and loss of open space are given as reasons for Measure A and ultimately the Element.

Conservation and Open Space Element

This Element was updated in 1983 and has been amended several times. Open space is divided into four categories: (1) open space for the preservation of natural resources; (2) open space for the managed production of resources, which includes the preservation and use of agricultural lands; (3) open space for outdoor recreation; and (4) open space for public health and safety, which addresses the preservation of clean air, pure water, and productive soils.

On agricultural land, the conservation policy requires limiting growth to minimize urban development on prime soils and reducing conflict with agricultural operations and the agricultural economy. The policy encourages using reclaimed water for frost protection and irrigation; creating Williamson Act contracts, especially for lands adjoining cities; establishing large parcel sizes, urban limit lines, and exclusive permanent agricultural zoning, and acquiring land to lease back to farm operators, or acquiring easements. Several environmental concerns are mentioned, such as good animal management to prevent overgrazing, erosion control measures for agricultural projects, the protection of trees and shrubs for wildlife habitat and aesthetic purposes, and the minimum use of pesticides through the use of non-chemical integrated pest control methods.

A planning goal includes using open space to guide urban growth by creating an open space system that maintains community identity. Policies include using farmland to provide visually pleasing open space and urban limit lines.
The land use goals of the General Plan and the Land Use Element contain strong statements about agriculture and farmland protection. The Growth Management Systems Element emphasizes restricting urban growth to protect both farmland and open space, while the Conservation and Open Space Element more often emphasizes open space and the natural environment than farmland protection.

LAFCO POLICY

The emphasis on preserving agriculture and open space land was established when LAFCO revised its policies in 1980. Several concepts occur more than once and include the following:

- extension of urban services promotes urban development;
- urban development belongs in urban areas;
- spheres of influence guide annexation, but they do not indicate carte blanche approval of annexation proposals;
- agricultural lands (either by contract arrangement or zoning classification) shall not be approved for annexation to any district for the promotion of urban development by the expansion of urban services;
- all unincorporated areas within a city’s sphere of influence that can be served by essential city services should be developed and annexed before additional lands around the city;
- no urban development, which would lead to annexation, should be allowed outside a city’s sphere of influence; and
- agricultural lands outside spheres of influence shall not be approved for annexation to any city for the purposes of urban development or promotion of urban development by extension of urban services.

Each LAFCO report on city spheres of influence contains a standardized statement about the commission’s policy to (1) prevent premature conversion of prime agricultural land and open space land to urban uses; (2) encourage infill before development of open spaces; and (3) direct development away from prime land.

Although some exceptions and loopholes exist that could be taken advantage of by cities anxious to annex land, this has not occurred in Napa County in recent years. With the 1992 incorporation of American Canyon in south Napa County, however, there is some speculation as to the amount of land this city may want to annex over the next few years as it tries to raise revenues.

HISTORICAL AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Napa County experienced a significant increase in its population growth rate during the 1940s and 1950s. Despite a slight reduction in the growth rate in the 1960s, the population continued to increase rapidly. Although a major highway, such as Interstate 80 or Highway 101 does not directly connect the county to the more populated cities of the Bay Area, by 1970, 30 percent of the working residents commuted to areas outside the county to work.

During the mid 1960s a few residents became concerned with the future of agriculture in the county. Major agricultural commodities at that time included prunes, walnuts, pears, cattle, and grapes, but land in the Napa Valley could be divided into parcels as small as one acre. Napa’s reputation for having ideal soil and climate conditions for premium grape production was emerging again, and the California Legislature had enacted the Williamson Act, giving legitimacy to the concept of agricultural preserves. A few vintners, grape growers and other farmers, along with the County Administrator, Tax Assessor, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors began discussing the need for an agricultural preserve—eventually including 29,000 acres in the county. The proposal was vehemently fought by other farmers and landowners, but in 1968 the Board of Supervisors approved the agricultural preserve.

Napa County’s annual growth rate during the 1970s was 2.3 percent, faster than the 1.1 percent for the total Bay Area. A general plan proposed by the Planning Commission that emphasized agriculture and established a slow-growth platform encountered resistance from the Board of Supervisors. To support its proposal, the commission directed planning staff to survey all voters in the county regarding three planning options. The options ranged from agriculture and slow-growth to urban expansion and pro-growth. The survey results clearly demonstrated public support for a slow-growth, agricultural option. This survey, the Citizen’s Advisory Vote, took place in 1978 and seemed to contradict the majority of pro-growth supervisors elected by voters in the same year. Although the proposed general plan was adopted, a group of citizens decided to create Measure A, the Slow Growth Initiative, to protect the county against later board actions that could weaken the intent of the General Plan. Measure A was a mandate to abide by the “slow-growth and agriculture” wishes of the public and was passed by the voters in 1980.
Support for Measure A was strong in the city of Napa and this was not the first time residents favored slow growth. Although Napa is the largest city in the county and now accounts for nearly 60 percent of the county's total population of 111,000, the city's General Plan in 1968 envisioned a population of 150,000 within the city limits by the year 1990. It is less than half that today because the residents rejected that plan in an advisory ballot measure in 1973 and indicated a preference for a base population of not more than 75,000. A new General Plan was adopted in 1975 that reflected this vision and a Rural Urban Limit (RUL) line was also established. In response to the city's plan, the county included RUL policies within its General Plan in 1975. Today, both the RUL and the county's agricultural preserve are considered sacred, and candidates for public office are not likely to speak against them. For the most part, other cities in the county reflect slow-growth philosophies in their general plans, although the American Canyon General Plan is not yet completed. Table 5 lists the incorporated communities of Napa County and the 1990 population of these communities and the unincorporated area.

Table 5: 1990 Population of Napa County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorporated Cities*</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calistoga</td>
<td>4,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napa</td>
<td>59,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Helena</td>
<td>5,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yountville</td>
<td>3,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unincorporated Area</td>
<td>38,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* American Canyon was incorporated in 1992 with an estimated population of approximately 8,000.


The Napa County Farm Bureau in the late 1970s emerged as a supporter of the slow-growth movement and of farmland protection. The Farm Bureau supported Measure A and successfully defeated major subdivision proposals in unincorporated areas. It also joined with the Mid Valley Alliance to fight a proposal for a major hotel near Yountville. This fight developed into a general plan lawsuit against the county and ultimately led to a general plan that further strengthened resource protection. Many other local organizations and neighborhood groups also have gained a reputation for advocating slow growth and the protection of farmland and open space.

The 1992 incorporation of American Canyon was driven by developer interests while the agricultural community expressed opposition. When the American Canyon voters approved the creation of their city, however, they elected members to the city council who were concerned with maintaining the area's rural character, rather than the candidates backed by developer interests.

A tax-sharing agreement exists between the county and all cities except American Canyon. This agreement originally allowed 0.145 of every sales tax cent within the cities to go to the county. This sales tax split was recently changed by the city of Napa after heated discussions, reducing it to .07 in October 1990, and to .05 in 1991. The sharing of revenues is recognized as one method of preventing commercial/industrial development from occurring in unincorporated areas.

The tourist industry has grown substantially in the past few decades and predictions by the Napa Valley Conference and Visitors Bureau show five million visitors to Napa Valley in 1993, approximately ten percent more than 1992. Concern over the impacts of tourism on the county increased in the mid-1980s during the Winery Ordinance discussions. Agriculture (wineries) is recognized as the base of tourism, but fear that tourism will take on a life of its own and eventually destroy agriculture has been expressed in numerous public hearings.

Although 60 percent of the voters approved the Agricultural Lands Preservation Initiative (Measure J) in 1990, two open space measures were soundly defeated in November 1992. One involved the creation of an open space district and the other involved a sales tax increase to support the open space district. Proponents of the district claim it was poor timing. Meanwhile, the majority on the Board of Supervisors continues to fluctuate between pro-growth and slow-growth advocates. Still, Napa County remains the least populated and most rural of the nine Bay Area counties.
SONOMA COUNTY

Sonoma County is the largest in area of the four North Bay counties with a total agricultural production value for the 1992 crop year at $323 million. Although the city of Petaluma is noted for its early stand on limiting urban growth, the rest of the county did not establish agriculture and open space preservation policies until relatively recently. Clearly, the county is claiming its agricultural base and elevating the status of agriculture through policies in the General Plan and other farmland and open space programs.

FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE PROGRAMS

Table 6 gives an overview of the programs enacted in Sonoma County for the preservation of farmland and open space. These programs are discussed in more detail below.

Sonoma Land Trust (1975)

The Sonoma Land Trust is a nonprofit conservation group based in Santa Rosa. It was founded in 1975 by individuals concerned with the future of Sonoma Valley, but it has extended its involvement throughout the county. The Trust has 13 conservation easements currently in place. Easements are usually donated by property owners who, in turn, receive some tax advantages. Occasionally, the Trust purchases easements or title to land, but this usually requires below market values and grants from outside sources, such as the State Coastal Conservancy, Department of Fish and Game, Wildlife Conservation Board, or Proposition 70 funding. Currently, 9,260 acres are protected against development through conservation easements, land title holdings, or preacquisition where the land or easement is then granted to a public agency such as the Open Space District. Although the Trust’s program extends to both farmland and natural habitat, most projects protect natural habitat.

Sonoma County Agricultural Marketing Program—SCAMP (1989)

SCAMP began in 1989 and is the first countywide agricultural marketing program in the nation. It is a nonprofit program that helps Sonoma County farmers market and promote their agricultural products. The program originated as a proposal from a task force appointed by the Board of Supervisors after encouragement from the county’s Economic Development Board and UC Cooperative Extension. The goal of the task force was to develop ways to support and enhance local agriculture. SCAMP’s ultimate purpose is to “preserve Sonoma County’s agricultural heritage” through education and promotion. The county originally supported SCAMP with $25,000 for start-up costs. Operating costs are supported by membership dues, but each year SCAMP applies for TOT funds (Transient Occupancy Tax, or bed tax) from the county, which it can use for advertising Sonoma County agricultural products. Consumer education, advertising materials, and special promotions organized by SCAMP bring growers and processors closer to their intended markets. This collective approach to marketing is designed to help small farmers and to promote a reputation for high quality agricultural products. This program fulfills part of the intent of the Sonoma County General Plan. The concept of helping farmers market Sonoma County agriculture is mentioned in the General Plan as a way to increase agricultural economic viability and decrease farmers’ incentive or need to sub-divide agricultural land.

Right-to-Farm Ordinance (1989)

In response to the agricultural awareness created by the debate over the failed farmlands preservation initiative in 1984 (Measure C) and subsequent discussions and public hearings on the General Plan update, the Board of Supervisors passed a Right-to-Farm Ordinance in 1989. A notice is sent in the annual tax bills informing property owners that inconveniences from agriculture do not constitute nuisances. Anyone selling property near an agricultural operation must give the same notice to prospective buyers.

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation And Open Space District (1990)

Measures A and C were passed by Sonoma voters in November 1990. The first measure, passed by 70 percent of the voters, established the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, with the Board of Supervisors as the District’s Board of Directors. The second measure received 55 percent voter approval and established funding for the district through a quarter-cent sales tax over the next 20 years. An estimated $9 million will be generated from this sales tax. A major goal of the district is to purchase development rights along the Highway 101 corridor to preserve community separators. Lacking the power of condemnation, the Open Space Authority will purchase these rights from voluntary sellers. The District may also purchase land in fee title from willing sellers.
### Table 6: Land Use Programs in Sonoma County for the Preservation of Farmland and Open Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Year Enacted)</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1975)</td>
<td>Sonoma Land Trust</td>
<td>Accept donations of conservation easements or land title and/or purchase easements or title</td>
<td>Preserves land in its natural or agricultural state in perpetuity</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1989)</td>
<td>Sonoma County Agricultural Marketing Program (SCAMP)</td>
<td>Promote Sonoma County agricultural products</td>
<td>Provides marketing, promotion, and consumer education of locally-grown agricultural products</td>
<td>Board of Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1989)</td>
<td>Right-to-Farm Ordinance</td>
<td>Protect agriculture from nuisance complaints</td>
<td>Requires annual notification to property owners and notification to purchasers of real property</td>
<td>Board of Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1990)</td>
<td>Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Measures A and C)</td>
<td>Maintain open space between communities and along the Highway 101 corridor</td>
<td>Preserves open space and farmland in perpetuity by purchasing conservation or agricultural easements or land title</td>
<td>Countywide ballot measure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## GENERAL PLAN

Agriculture is a high priority in Sonoma County, which is evident in the 1989 General Plan and subsequent actions taken by the Board of Supervisors. Furthermore, the agricultural priority is expressed, for the most part, with consistency throughout the elements of this General Plan.

An Agricultural Resources Element was added to the Sonoma County General Plan as part of a March 1989 update. Agriculture is strongly represented throughout the General Plan, the result of a debate that began in the early 1980s.

Following the defeat of the 1984 Farmlands Initiative, the Board of Supervisors appointed committees to help update the 1978 General Plan and to design the Agricultural Resources Element. Since the 1989 update, a number of implementation measures affecting agriculture and open space have been put in place.

According to the General Plan, agricultural land and the agricultural industry provides Sonoma County with the following benefits:

- community separators;
- scenic resources;
- rural character;
- a major component to the county’s economy;
- a source of energy through agricultural biomass conversion; and
- a destination for treated urban wastewater.

## Open Space Element

In the Open Space Element, farmland is recognized as a scenic resource and important for maintaining the agricultural economy. Farmland plays a role in establishing community separators that have scenic values and contribute to rural character. Uses incompatible with farming are to be avoided in separator areas. As a technique for protecting separators, an Open Space District can acquire development rights.

Agricultural conflicts with other resources are cited in policies dealing with both riparian corridors and parks, including equestrian and hiking trails. The impacts can be experienced in either direction. In riparian areas farming activities can produce negative results by causing overgrazing and the removal of natural vegetation. Conversely, farming may be negatively effected by riparian areas, which can increase habitat for pests and plant diseases. The goal is to balance agricultural production with the preservation of riparian values. Agricultural cultivation in riparian corridors is restricted to setbacks (in feet), but vegetation removal is allowed if part of an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program administered by the Ag Commissioner. As to parks and trails, the goal is to further recreational opportunities—specifically, equestrian and hiking trails, including a countywide trail system—while protecting agricultural uses. Fencing and the careful location of trails are to accomplish this.
Land Use Element

Nine general goals and policies are cited, three of them worth noting in relation to farmland: (1) compact urban areas with boundaries; (2) separation between urban areas with open space; and (3) protection of agricultural lands.

The following objectives are associated with the nine goals:

- city-centered growth;
- limited population growth and development outside urban centers;
- infill and compact development in urban areas; and
- no extension of sewer and water outside a sphere of influence or urban service area.

One of the goals is the creation of “opportunities for diverse rural urban residential environments,” which could cause a potential conflict with farmland and open space protection. Before a general plan amendment can add rural residential development, however, the land in question must not be located in an agricultural production area or adversely affect existing or potential farming operations.

Several objectives are associated with Land Use Goal Number 8, which emphasizes the protection of agricultural soils:

- avoid conversion of land from agricultural to non-agricultural uses;
- retain large parcels in agricultural production areas;
- discourage uses that are incompatible with long term agricultural production;
- prevent development of lands with potential agricultural production in a way that precludes them from future agricultural use; and
- support farming by permitting limited small-scale farm services and visitor-serving uses in agricultural areas.

Three categories of land are established under the Agricultural Land Use policy: (1) Land Intensive Agriculture, which includes highly productive agricultural lands; (2) Land Extensive Agriculture, which includes land where soil and climate conditions result in relatively low production per acre of land; and (3) Diverse Agriculture, which includes land where farming may not be the principal occupation of the farmer.

Amendments to add the Intensive Agriculture designations to land must meet one or more of six criteria that relate to adequate soil, water, and climate for agricultural production; large parcel sizes; historic uses; Williamson Act Contracts; and the use of surrounding lands. Parcel sizes in this category range from 20 to 100 acres, depending on soil and water conditions. Parcel sizes in the Land Extensive Agriculture are 60 to 320 acres, depending on the location of the Land and Williamson Act Contracts. In the Diverse Agriculture category, parcel sizes are ten to 60 acres, depending on location.

An area open to interpretation is the placement of agricultural processing plants on agricultural land and whether this could potentially conflict with the protection of farmland.

Overall, the Land Use Element is favorable to farmland protection and elevates agriculture’s status above other resource-related uses of land, such as mining and geothermal plants.

Resource Conservation Element

This Element addresses the conservation and maintenance of long term productivity of resource lands. Although it recognizes that highly productive agricultural areas are also desirable for building sites because of relatively few physical constraints, the soil resource policy of the Element advocates maintaining soil productivity and preventing lands with productive soils from converting to non-resource uses. Farmland concerns are related to a number of other resource goals and objectives, including:

- the prevention of soil erosion;
- the use of farm byproducts (i.e., manure and biomass) for energy production;
- the contribution of agriculture to particulate matter in the air; and
- the effects of air pollution on crops.

Another objective is to regularly track farmland conversions to other uses by using the state’s Farmland Mapping Program.

Agricultural Resources Element

This Element emphasizes the economic viability of Sonoma County agriculture, and it applies only to lands designated within the three agricultural land use categories mentioned in the Land Use Element.

Among this Element’s goals and policies are the marketing and promotion of the county’s agricultural products so that a healthy and competitive industry will reduce economic pressure on farmers and ranchers to subdivide or convert land to
non-agricultural uses. One related objective is to permit the marketing of products grown and/or processed in Sonoma County in all areas designated for agricultural uses. Other policies include:

- limiting the extension of urban services to stabilize agricultural uses at the urban fringe;
- using cluster housing and easements to maintain large farm parcels;
- encouraging buffers to protect farms from adjacent urban uses;
- regulating visitor-serving commercial uses to be compatible with longterm agriculture;
- organizing promotional marketing programs for local agriculture; and
- streamlining permit processing for farm-support uses on designated agricultural land.

LAFCO POLICY

Sonoma’s LAFCO policy guidelines dated January 9, 1992 largely affirm existing state policies regarding the diversion of development away from prime farmland. LAFCO actions are to be consistent with city or county general plans, the premature extension of urban services is to be avoided, and development is encouraged in cities rather than unincorporated areas. A new policy adopted in 1992 advocated by most of the county’s cities (the exceptions were Rohnert Park and Windsor), prohibits municipal annexations within community separators and disallows such separators within spheres of influence. In most other respects the LAFCO guidelines lack specificity and leave much room for interpretation.

HISTORICAL AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Sonoma County’s primary industry historically has been agriculture, and today it ranks 16th among California counties in its agricultural value.

As a bedroom community for San Francisco and Marin County, facilitated by the Highway 101 link, Sonoma experienced considerable growth in the years after World War II. Farmland conversions to other uses averaged 5,000 acres annually in the 1960s, although other land was brought into cultivation and market values for agricultural products increased. Public concern about population pressures emerged in the 1970s and Petaluma enacted the nation’s first growth limitation policy. By 1980, 25,000 residents were listed as commuters to jobs outside the county, further substantiating the idea of Sonoma’s future as a bedroom community.

In addition, earlier population estimates were exceeded by actual growth; the 1990 population of 385,400 was 22,000 more persons than projected in the General Plan. Table 7 lists the unincorporated communities in Sonoma County and the 1990 population of these communities and the unincorporated area.

Table 7: 1990 Population of Sonoma County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorporated Cities*</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cloverdale</td>
<td>4,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotati</td>
<td>5,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healdsburg</td>
<td>9,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petaluma</td>
<td>42,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohnert Park</td>
<td>34,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Rosa</td>
<td>112,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastopol</td>
<td>6,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma</td>
<td>8,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unincorporated Area</td>
<td>160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>385,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The city of Windsor incorporated in 1992 with an estimated population of approximately 13,500.


Immigration now accounts for 70 percent of the county’s growth. Despite local job growth, out-of-county commuting is expected to increase. The newly incorporated (1992) city of Windsor is growing more rapidly than other areas; this community doubled its population in the 1980s.

In this same decade, farmland loss became a major issue. Measure C, the 1984 Farmlands Initiative, was fiercely fought by advocates for private property rights. The farm community was split on the issue, which confused the general public and ultimately led to the defeat of the measure. But the Board of Supervisors soon responded to the new public awareness about farmland loss by establishing larger minimum parcels on agricultural land, despite opposition from landowners, and asserting the need for an Agricultural Element in the General Plan. The Board also began the process that resulted in the 1989 General Plan, which increased the emphasis on agriculture and farmland protection.

Recent years have seen more aggressive efforts to protect farmland and open space, including progress to implement the 1989 General Plan. In 1990
Sonoma County voters rejected a sales tax increase to finance a rail transit system, but approved a sales tax increase to pay for the purchase of open space.

The county government now works closely with agriculture to streamline permits for farmworker housing, a concept discussed in the General Plan. The Planning Department has designated a planner to work on farmworker housing. As a result, the time for processing permits can be as short as one week and the supply of farmworker housing has recently increased. In the past, Sonoma agriculture received much negative publicity about housing conditions, including newspaper accounts about farmworkers camping under bridges and along the Russian River during harvest season.

Agricultural organizations in the county include the Sonoma County Farmlands Group, founded in 1980 as an advocate of farmland preservation and an active player in the creation of Measure C and other measures. The United Winegrowers often lobbies county government on agricultural issues. The Coordinating Council, started in 1992, works to increase public education about agriculture and conservation and includes in its membership the Resource Conservation District, Sonoma County Farm Bureau, Sonoma County Farmlands Group, Sonoma Land Trust, SCAMP, the Open Space District, and the County Office of Education. A recent survey, stimulated by the Coordinating Council and carried out by UC Cooperative Extension and CSU Sonoma, found strong support among city residents (87 percent of those surveyed) for slowing down urbanization and preserving agriculture and open space.

The county government recently disagreed with the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) over population projections and affordable housing goals. County projections are smaller than ABAG’s and are based on limited wastewater treatment capacity and Highway 101 congestion. To meet ABAG’s housing goals, 1,000 housing units would have to be constructed on farmland, according to local leaders.
MARIN COUNTY

Marin’s proximity to San Francisco made it the first of the four North Bay counties to experience urban pressure from the City. But early interest in conservation by local citizens and the county’s topography influenced urban development in Marin so that it remains a rural county by Bay Area standards and one of the least populated Bay Area counties. Marin County benefits from substantial state and federal parklands and has developed a Countywide Plan that guards open space and farmland.

Farmland protection, originally motivated by the desire to retain open space, was followed by a concern for agriculture’s viability, which was demonstrated when conservationists and the Board of Supervisors supported the agricultural community, specifically the dairy farmers, during difficult times.

According to the Marin County Crop Report for 1992 the agricultural production (including aquaculture) value is $41 million. Milk production accounts for 69 percent of that total.

FARMLAND AND OPEN SPACE PROGRAMS

Table 8 gives an overview of the programs enacted in Marin County for the preservation of farmland and open space. These programs are discussed in more detail below.

Parks, Watershed, and Recreation

Lands reserved for parks, watershed and recreation have played a key role in Marin County farmland and open space protection. In addition to providing open space, these lands provided some barriers to westward expansion of urban areas along Highway 101. These lands include the Samuel P. Taylor State Park, acquired in 1945 as the result of a local conservation movement, another state park on Mount Tamalpais, and the watershed lands of Marin Municipal Water District in the south. In 1959 the federal government announced plans to buy 53,000 acres of land for a coastal park on the Point Reyes Peninsula. It was authorized by Congress in 1962, although final purchase of all land for the Point Reyes National Seashore did not occur until 1972. The law establishing the park created a “pastoral zone” where farming (primarily dairy) could continue. The federal government bought land from farmers then leased it back to them with explicit standards for grazing and erosion control. The Golden Gate National Recreation Area was authorized in 1972. It stretches along the coast from Point Reyes National Seashore south to the Golden Gate, adding another 34,000 acres of parkland and including the Olema Valley. Again, the federal government established long-term leases with farmers after buying their land. The farms are being passed along to the next generation, while the option to convert agricultural land to development has been eliminated.

Marin Countywide Plan and A-60 Zoning (1971-73)

The document that eventually became the Marin Countywide Plan took several years to develop (1965-1971), a process that occurred during fluctuations between pro-conservation and pro-development majorities on the Board of Supervisors. A West Marin Master Plan directing suburban development in West Marin was approved by the board in 1967, and in 1968 the county and eleven cities created the City-County Planning Council through a joint powers agreement. In 1971 a new majority on the Board of Supervisors reversed the West Marin Plan for development and passed an interim ordinance making policies in the recently-released Preliminary Marin Countywide Plan effective. This strengthened open space protection in West Marin. In 1972 the Board of Supervisors began hearings on the agricultural zoning of West Marin. Rancher and developer interests fought urban conservationists, but the supervisors overrode landowner objections and zoned most of West Marin agriculture with 60 acre minimum parcels (A-60). The Marin Countywide Plan, formally adopted by the board in October 1973, divides the county into three distinct zones: (1) an eastern city-centered corridor along Highway 101; (2) a coastal recreation corridor; and (3) an inland rural corridor between the urban and recreation corridors. This third corridor is devoted to open space—agriculture and municipal watershed. Most of the details of the Countywide Plan address the eastern urban corridor, identifying areas for additional city expansion. A greenbelt serves as a means to limit urban expansion into the western rural corridor, with open space the primary concern for West Marin, and agriculture a way to preserve open space.

Marin County Open Space District (1972)

A popular vote established this countywide open space district in 1972 and created property tax funding for the program. The District up to now has acquired title or conservation easements on more than 12,000 acres, and actually manages more than 9,000 of these acres within 25 open space preserves. The
Table 8: Land Use Programs in Marin County for the Preservation of Farmland and Open Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Enacted</th>
<th>Program (Title)</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1971-73)</td>
<td>Marin Countywide Plan and A-60 Zoning</td>
<td>Protect land for agriculture and open space</td>
<td>Maintains open space and agriculture as the primary use of land in West Marin</td>
<td>Board of Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1972)</td>
<td>Marin County Open Space District</td>
<td>Purchase easements or land title</td>
<td>Protects open space land along ridge lines and between cities</td>
<td>Countywide Ballot Measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1972)</td>
<td>California Coastal Act (Proposition 20)</td>
<td>Protect a unique resource</td>
<td>Preserves open space along the coast through strict zoning</td>
<td>California Voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1980)</td>
<td>Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT)</td>
<td>Purchase agricultural easements</td>
<td>Preserves agricultural land in perpetuity</td>
<td>Private (some public funds involved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1987)</td>
<td>Transfer of Development Rights</td>
<td>Allow transfer of development rights through the County Zoning Ordinance</td>
<td>Removes development potential on one parcel by transferring it to increase density on another parcel</td>
<td>Board of Supervisors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ballot measure was organized by a conservation-minded group that wanted to preserve the ridgelines and green hillsides around their communities in the valleys of east Marin. The Board of Supervisors is the District’s board of directors. Although the directors have the power of condemnation, they have never used it. Cities often zone land for open space, then ask the District to purchase the land. Open space acquisition is funded roughly one-third by the District’s property tax, one-third by the city, and one-third by outside sources (e.g., Nature Conservancy, Department of Fish and Game, Audubon, Sierra Club). The District has been most active in the urban corridor of the county, preserving ridgelines between communities and between the county’s urban east side and rural west side.

California Coastal Act—Proposition 20 (1972)
California voters authorized the creation of the Coastal Commission in November 1972, calling for six regional commissions to administer coastal planning. In Marin County, the regional commission prevented plans for development along the eastern shores of Tomales Bay when the Countywide Plan showed a mixture of ranching and resort development. The commission allowed only agriculture. Although a revision in the state coastal planning law occurred in the mid-1970s, and the regional commissions were later eliminated, a local coastal plan was developed as required by law. Implementation of this plan was accomplished through the county’s zoning ordinance, that requires land in the coastal zone outside of the various parklands be zoned APZ-60. This zone has stricter standards than other agricultural zones in the county and conversion to other uses is prohibited.

Marin Agricultural Land Trust—MALT (1980)
The Marin Agricultural Land Trust, a nonprofit organization, was founded in 1980 to retain farmland and other open space areas in perpetuity. Initial conversations with the national Trust for Public Land convinced local environmental and agricultural leaders that development rights and transfer or purchase programs would be appropriate tools. As a demonstration of support, the Board of Supervisors allocated one-tenth of property taxes collected by the Marin County Open Space District to the new effort. (MALT’s efforts are concentrated in West Marin, while the Open Space District concentrates on urban east Marin.) Other financial support has come from the Buck Trust (dedicated to Marin County projects), the California Coastal Conservancy, and Proposition 70. Using easement acquisitions, MALT’s mission is to maintain productive agriculture, not just green hillsides. Its purpose is to:

- facilitate the process of generational transfer by minimizing estate and inheritance taxes on ranch properties;
- deal with the threat of losing farmland when a farmer decides to go out of business;
- enable farmers to expand their holdings; and
- assist young, entering farmers to acquire ranch land.

Outside parklands, Marin’s agricultural belt involves approximately 145,000 acres, and MALT has nearly 12,000 of these acres under easement.
Transfer of Development Rights (1987)

One TDR transaction, the La Franci transfer near Nicasio, has taken place in Marin County. A Nicasio community plan in 1979 mentioned TDRs as a tool for keeping land in agriculture. The La Franci family in 1982 began to pursue this method for preserving 660 acres of farmland. Five years later an agreement was signed with the county to permanently eliminate any non-agricultural use or development on the ranch. The development right was transferred to another property closer to Nicasio where densities were increased. The county planning staff was involved throughout the process, which required amendments to the community plan, rezonings, approval of development plans, and zoning ordinance changes to address “county-rights transfers.” The La Franci transfer provides a model for future TDRs in the county.

GENERAL PLAN

According to the Marin Countywide Plan, agriculture provides the county with the following benefits:

- open space;
- an important part of Marin’s economy; and
- a visual and scenic resource.

The 1982 Countywide Plan reaffirms the goals set in the 1973 Plan, which established environmental quality as a primary concern and provided a foundation for continued cooperative planning by the cities and the county. Among its goals are the discouragement of rapid or disruptive population growth and achievement of high quality natural and built environments through a balanced system of transportation, land use, and open space.

In the Environmental Quality Element (this corresponds to the Conservation and Open Space Elements mandated by the state) permanent preservation open space is grouped into categories and agriculture falls under “Resource Production.” Policies are explicit, stating that agricultural lands shall be preserved and soil capability maintained. Open space policies include maintaining streams, estuaries, marshes, bays and tidelands in their natural state. Unique natural sites and features will be maintained in their natural state and vegetation and animal habitats shall be preserved wherever possible. Adequate parks, recreation facilities, and open space shall be provided with appropriate public access. Implementation measures for open space acquisition include purchase of land, purchase of easements or development rights, land trusts, tax reduction contracts similar to Williamson Act contracts, and transfer of development rights. Several paragraphs are devoted to the TDR concept.

The Countywide Plan divides Marin County into three corridors: the City-Centered Corridor, the Inland Rural Corridor, and the Coastal Recreation Corridor. These three corridors are clearly different in their open space and development objectives.

City-Centered Corridor

Urban development is to be concentrated in the City-Centered Corridor so that the rest of the county can remain as open as possible. Three zones are part of the City-Centered Corridor, including the bay shore, the bayside plains separated by ridges that extend into the bay, and bayside foothills, knolls and ridges. Most of Marin’s development is in the bayside plains, while the foothills experience the most pressure for development.

Specific open space areas are noted for the City-Centered Corridor, each with a set number of acres that need to be secured. Secured open space is land that has been purchased or land with easements that have been purchased by the Open Space District or other public agencies that assure preservation. The figures show plans for more area in secured public open space than in development in the year 1990.

The Marin County Open Space District is responsible for open space in the City-Centered Corridor and priority is given to areas identified as open space in the Countywide Plan or other general or specific plans. Ridgetops and areas under immediate threat of development are given high priority.

In the bayfront lands of the City-Centered Corridor, existing agricultural uses shall be protected by the county, in part because of their visual and scenic values and their compatibility with water-related wildlife habitat. Agriculture on the bayfront lands is mainly grazing that is harmonious with adjoining marshes, wetlands, grasslands, or other sensitive lands. These agricultural activities should minimize removal of natural vegetation where possible, and the use of pesticides should comply with existing federal and state standards as implemented by the county Agricultural Commissioner.

Inland Rural Corridor

Most of the land in the Inland Rural Corridor is used for agriculture. The combination of agricultural zoning (one residential unit per 60 acres) and Williamson Act contracts with landowners
will continue to be used to preserve open space land. Some public open space exists through the Marin Municipal Water District lands and state and local parks. Some of this public land is in conservation zones along stream course buffers. The grazing of livestock and other agricultural uses are allowed in the stream conservation areas with proper permits, although the confinement of livestock is prohibited in this area.

**Coastal Recreation Corridor**

Most of the land in the Coastal Recreation Corridor is owned by public agencies for recreational purposes (e.g., Point Reyes National Seashore, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Stinson Beach State Park). Detailed policies for this corridor are included in the Local Coastal Plan adopted by the Board of Supervisors and the California Coastal Commission. Zoning and contracts help preserve and encourage the retention of agricultural activities in the Coastal Recreation Corridor's agricultural areas.

In the Community Development Element (this corresponds to the state's mandated Land Use Element), clear priorities are mentioned for density and location of future development. The first priority encourages infill of developed areas and the second priority encourages development on the fringes of developed areas.

Part 5 of the Countywide Plan describes Urban Service Areas and mentions that the county shall be a primary protector of rural areas, particularly lands located in the Coastal Recreation and Inland Rural Corridors, while the cities will act as primary providers of urban services. The county will discourage urban scale development outside of city urban service areas. A clear statement is made that lands in agricultural use should not be included in Urban Service Areas.

According to the Housing Element, open space, recreational areas, and small villages compliment agriculture in the Inland Rural Corridor. Development intensity is low in order to protect existing agricultural and recreation/open space uses. Unincorporated villages retain their rural or semi-rural character by remaining geographically small with low density development.

The Marin Countywide Trails Plan notes that farm-land owners have negative views about recreational trails crossing their property. While all owners are concerned about liability, ranchers and livestock owners in particular worry about their liability for damage and accidents caused by animals released from enclosures. It is clear that public trail acquisitions are not to occur on agricultural lands in production.

The Economic Element states that the viability of agricultural, commercial fishing, and rural economic activities should be encouraged through zoning and taxation policies. It notes that the protection of agricultural uses in West Marin has allowed ranching to maintain a significant role in serving regional dairy markets.

**LAFCO Policy**

The Marin LAFCO has several formal policies that give a clear and concise explanation of acceptable lands to urbanize and emphasize the need to protect rural areas, open space, and agricultural lands.

- According to the Sphere of Influence Policies, the extension of urban services promotes urban development and such development belongs in cities (adopted 1977).
- According to the Agricultural Lands Policies, infill should be encouraged over urban development on agricultural or open space lands outside a city's jurisdiction or sphere of influence (adopted 1977).
- According to the Agricultural Lands Policies, land is currently engaged in the substantial production of food, fiber, or livestock, or is identified as agricultural land, either by zoning classification, Williamson Act contract, or by general plan designation, shall not be annexed to a city or a sanitary sewer agency for the purpose of promoting urban development (adopted 1983).
- According to the Annexation Program Policy, cities should annex unincorporated lands located within their LAFCO adopted municipal urban service area or sphere of influence boundary (adopted 1983).

Annexations are not a major issue in Marin because most cities do not want to grow and have made the political decision to refrain from extending infrastructure development. Therefore, much of the county's recent growth has occurred in the unincorporated communities.
HISTORICAL AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Marin County has a reputation for farmland and open space protection and for preserving the natural environment. With the exception of state and federal parks, many of the tools associated with this protection were not established until after farmland protection was firmly fixed in the county’s politics. Marin County residents have been conservation oriented starting in 1934 with the founding of the Marin Conservation League, one of California’s oldest local conservation organizations. In addition, the Environmental Forum, founded in 1972, provides environmental training for citizen leaders.

The potential for development increased significantly in the late 1930s with the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge, which led to rapid urban growth. This growth motivated local conservationists to advocate more parklands. They blocked freeway plans for Route 17 from San Rafael to Point Reyes Station in the 1960s, which would have made West Marin more accessible to development. While a majority of the Board of Supervisors still supported the freeway, state highway planners gave it lower priority and eventually abandoned their plans. In 1969 the Golden Gate Bridge District was reorganized by the Legislature and bus service from San Francisco to Marin was substantially increased.

A few outside influences in the 1960s challenged the future of development. The federal government bought park land along the coast, the California Legislature enacted the Williamson Act to encourage farmland protection, and the Association of Bay Area Governments recommended in an advisory regional plan that land slated for development in West Marin should become open space.

Struggles between conservationists and pro-growth forces characterized the county’s politics in the 1960s, with fluctuating majorities on the Board of Supervisors. Marin’s most rapid population growth occurred during this period. Speculation by developers on land in West Marin began and ranchland was purchased by local and southern California investors with the intention to develop it. The future of the county’s dairy industry at that time was questionable as a number of local farms ceased operation because of competition from larger scale, more efficient dairies in the Central Valley. Earlier in the century Marin was the leading dairy county in California, but the advantages of high rainfall and close proximity to markets were overcome by cheaper transportation and federal and state water projects elsewhere. A number of farmers along Highway 101 sold out to developers in the 1960s, leading to expectations that dairies in West Marin would follow.

Consequently, spokespersons for local agriculture argued against large lot zoning as a means to preserve agriculture on Marin’s west side. They maintained that without economic viability, farmland protection was useless, and the land in question was not prime farmland, rather it was grassland, good only for grazing.

In 1971 the Marin County Planning Department published “Can the Last Place Last?” This document described Marin’s environmental characteristics and issues, and it contained the preliminary Marin Countywide Plan, which was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in October 1973. The previous November voters approved the creation of the Marin County Open Space District. The district preserved open space lands of unique local importance, while state and federal efforts preserved land of statewide or national significance. By 1980, more than 86,000 acres were dedicated to open space as a result of local, state, and federal efforts. The county’s topographical features, especially the Coastal Mountain Range that provides a physical barrier between the agricultural west side and the urban east side, helped to contain urban growth.

A unique relationship developed between the conservationists and the farm community in the 1970s, after strict zoning was established for farmland and open space. Conservationists and county government began to support the local agricultural industry financially and politically. The county helped farmers build drainage ditches and ponds to eliminate water pollution from their dairies after a 1973 mandate from the California State Water Resources Control Board. During the mid-1970s drought, the Board of Supervisors partially funded the cost of hauling water to the dairies. Marin conservationists supported higher milk prices at a 1977 hearing of the Milk Stabilization Board. The Environmental Forum also developed an agricultural program in the late 1970s to increase public understanding of the farming issues.

Table 9 lists the unincorporated communities in Marin County and the 1990 population of these communities and the unincorporated area. A joint powers agreement between the county and cities for a Countywide Planning Agency was formally adopted in 1990, following earlier coordination efforts. Presently, the Planning Commission has approved an updated Countywide Plan, its final adoption pending approval by the Board of Supervisors. The
new plan has similar policies to the 1982 Plan with regard to open space and agriculture, but it includes an Agricultural Element and recommendation for a Right-to-Farm Ordinance.

Table 9: 1990 Population of Marin County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorporated Cities</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belvedere</td>
<td>2,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corte Madera</td>
<td>8,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax</td>
<td>7,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larkspur</td>
<td>11,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mill Valley</td>
<td>13,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novato</td>
<td>48,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>2,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Anselmo</td>
<td>12,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Rafael</td>
<td>47,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sausalito</td>
<td>7,575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiburon</td>
<td>8,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unincorporated Area</td>
<td>66,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>237,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Measure A on the June 1992 ballot would have created a parcel tax to help fund the Open Space District and MALT. Although the majority of voters approved it, the measure lost, barely short of the two-thirds votes needed. The county’s voters in November 1992 defeated a proposal that restricted uses allowed on agricultural land and the rezoning of agricultural land to other uses. Although some concepts in this measure were similar to those in Measure I adopted in Napa County in 1990, opponents said the Marin measure was poorly written and originally created to defeat a specific project.

Voters in Tiburon recently approved a measure to tax themselves for the purpose of purchasing open space on the Tiburon Peninsula. More than 80 percent of the voters approved this measure. Meanwhile, a parks bill in Congress promises to increase parkland in Marin County if passed.
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