



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

Department of Agriculture/Measurement Standards

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TO: Ag Liaison Advisory Board (ALAB)

FROM: Michael Isensee, Agriculture Department

RE: Agriculture Department Verification of Agricultural Use

Agriculture Policy 6 directs the county to ensure that visitor and retail commercial uses and facilities (commonly referred to as “ag tourism”) on agricultural land are clearly incidental and secondary to the primary agricultural use of the site. This policy directive would ensure that the beneficiaries of accessory visitor and commercial uses are farmers and ranchers, not simply owners of land designated for agricultural use.

ALAB had several discussions in the spring and summer of 2007 regarding how best to ensure visitor uses on agricultural lands are located on sites where the primary use is agriculture. On 30 April 2007 and again on 16 July 2007, ALAB passed motions to recommend to staff and the Board of Supervisors the following process to determine if a site had a primary agricultural use:

Use the minimum parcel size subdivision standards for the Agriculture land use category based upon the agricultural land use, that is a minimum of 20 acre of planted prime farmland, 40 acres intensive crops, 160 acres field crops, and 320 acres grazing land.

Since that time, Agriculture Department staff has further discussed various options for verifying a site has a primary agricultural use. The Agriculture Department felt that using the subdivision standards would too greatly limit the number of smaller farm operations which could obtain visitor uses. Attached is what staff is proposing to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. Staff will provide a chart at the February 4 ALAB meeting outlining the variety of options that were considered.

Staff is also recommending that the process be called a *verification of agricultural use* rather than a clearance letter. This is because the proposed process would require that staff verify two items:

- That there is an agricultural use that meets the minimum required.
- That the area devoted to visitor use does not exceed the maximum allowed.

Agriculture Department Verification of Agricultural Use

When located in the Agriculture land use category, a letter shall be submitted from the Agriculture Department which verifies that the site has an adequate agricultural use located on the site and the proposed visitor use is incidental to the agricultural use.

1. Determination of adequate agricultural use

A minimum of one the following agricultural uses must be present:

- A. 2 acres of nursery/greenhouse production
- B. 5 acres in permanent irrigated crops (trees, vines)
- C. 10 acres in annual irrigated crops (row crops)
- D. 40 acres of irrigated pasture* or dry-farmed perennial crops harvested annually
- E. 100 acres in dry-farmed crops harvested annually
- F. 300 acres actively grazed to a commercial standard

G. Approved agricultural processing use

- AND-

2. Incidental Visitor Use Determination

- A. The area devoted to the visitor use may not exceed five (5) percent of the area devoted to the agricultural use, to a maximum visitor use area of five (5) acres.
- B. When the agricultural use is less than ten (10) acres in size, the visitor use may be up to ten (10) percent of the area devoted to the agricultural use.
- C. When the agricultural use is an approved agricultural processing use, the visitor use area may not exceed the area devoted to processing.**

* Irrigated pasture is land which supports livestock used for the production of food and fiber and which has an annual carrying capacity equivalent to at least one animal unit per acre as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (from Govt Code 51201)

Note: BOLD FACED items (1.G. and 2.C.) were added after the Agricultural Liaison Meeting on February 4, 2008.