

## 5.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

### 5.2.1 Environmental Setting

San Luis Obispo County has diverse physical features that provides for a wide variety of agricultural uses. Characteristics potentially affecting the land for agricultural use include topography, soils, climate, natural vegetation, water availability and surrounding non-agricultural uses.

The climate of the coastal area west of the Santa Lucia Range is very different from that of the interior. Coastal temperatures are moderate throughout the year by humid marine air, including fog during spring and summer. The nearly frost-free climate allows year-round production of vegetables (typically 2 to 3 crops per year) in coastal valleys and citrus, avocados and other subtropical fruits in the foothills.

Irrigated agriculture in the area is primarily dependent on the quantity, quality, and depth of groundwater. The Santa Maria Groundwater Basin provides water to the subject area and is the largest of the coastal basins. Soils of the area are shown in Figure 5.6-2 and described in Section 5.6.1.5.

The project site is within the South County Planning Area. There are a wide range of agricultural uses occurring on the adjacent Nipomo Mesa. However, most of the designated agriculture on the mesa includes lands currently under agricultural preserve contracts (see Section 5.2.1.1). Non-contract lands include avocado and citrus orchards, tree farms and grazing land. None of the area is considered Prime Farmland.

The project area comprises a total of approximately 54 acres. The existing land use designations of the site include Residential Suburban (RS) (9.3 acres) and Commercial Service (CS) (44.7 acres). The existing uses within the LUO/LUE amendment area include: scattered commercial buildings, an old farmhouse, a variety of heavy equipment and portable buildings, stockpiles of recycled asphalt and concrete, and an existing concrete batch plant and recycling operations. The latter involves material stockpiles, silos, and equipment that are comparable to those of the proposed asphaltic concrete plant. The preferred alternative would involve changing the zoning of both the 9.3-acre area and 44.7-acre area to Industrial (IND) and construction of an asphalt plant at the existing concrete batch plant site (the concrete batch plant would be moved to an adjacent parcel). Many of the parcels within the project area are small, less than 5 acres.

As shown in Figure 4-2, agriculturally-zoned uses occur adjacent to the project site. Grazing activities are found on the other side of the freeway to the east. Row crops are found approximately 5,000 feet to the southwest across the river, and grazing is found to the west on top of the Nipomo Mesa.

### 5.2.1.1 Land Use Compatibility

The County of San Luis Obispo Agricultural Commissioner is charged with promoting and protecting agricultural resources, protecting the public’s health and safety, and providing the County and Cities with technical information and assistance in dealing with land use compatibility and capability issues affecting agriculture. This is accomplished through the review of land use proposals in or near agricultural areas and providing recommended measures where necessary. As appropriate, the Department of Agriculture will evaluate projects for land use conflicts. Recommended measures are provided where significant land use conflict determinations are made.

Land use compatibility issues include, but are not limited to: pesticide use, noise, dust, trespassing, vandalism, theft, litter, liability issues, rodent control, agricultural burns, and erosion.

The most effective mitigation measures for these issues are open space buffers between the land uses. The margin of safety and probability of conflicts are considered in determining setback distances. Because production practices vary considerably by type of crop, as well as other factors (e.g., prevailing wind, topography, etc.) buffer distances may vary accordingly.

Site-specific non-crop factors and proposal specifications often affect the final buffer distance recommendations within the ranges presented in Table 5.2-1. Other mitigation measures, such as screening, may also affect buffer distance recommendations.

**Table 5.2-1. Agricultural Buffer Distance Ranges**

Type of Agricultural Use	Buffer Distance
Vineyard	400 - 800 feet
Irrigated Orchard	300 - 800 feet
Irrigated Vegetables and Berries	200 - 500 feet
Field Crops	100 - 400 feet
Dry Farm Almonds	100 - 200 feet
Rangeland/Pasture	50 - 200 feet
Wholesale Nurseries Outdoor Grown	100 - 500 feet
Greenhouse	50 - 250 feet

Source: San Luis Obsipo Agricultural Commissioner

Parcels under agricultural use, but not within the Agriculture land use category may also affect buffer distance determinations.

## 5.2.2 Impact Analysis

### 5.2.2.1 Thresholds of Significance

For the purposes of this EIR, a significant impact to agriculture resources is assumed to occur if the proposed project results in any of the following conditions:

1. Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;
2. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; and,
3. Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use.

### 5.2.2.2 Asphalt Plant Impacts

**Impact AG-1.** Fugitive dust and asphalt plant operations may indirectly impact adjacent agricultural fields.

**Discussion:** Construction of the proposed asphalt plant would have no direct impacts to agricultural resources because no activities are being proposed within soils considered prime or of statewide importance. Secondly, the project will not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract. Thirdly, it will not involve other changes in the existing environment that could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

Fugitive dust emissions from construction may cause indirect impacts to adjacent agricultural crops. Also, emissions from operation of the asphalt plant could indirectly impact agricultural resources. Considering the distance of the proposed asphalt plant in relation to the adjacent agricultural uses, mitigation measures contained in Section 5.3 Air Quality to control fugitive dust emissions as well as those to minimize emissions from plant operations will minimize any potential impact to agricultural resources (personal communication with Lynda Auchinachie and Tamara Kleemann, Agricultural Commissioner's, August 4, 2004)

**Impact Category:** Significant but Mitigable

**Thresholds of Significance Criteria:** 2

**Mitigation Measures:** See Air Quality section (Section 5.3) for dust and emissions controls.

**Residual Impacts**

Less than significant.

### 5.2.2.3 LUO/LUE Amendment Impacts

**Impact AG-2:** The LUO/LUE amendment may have an indirect impact on agricultural resources.

**Discussion:** Although the area currently zoned for agriculture is outside the project area (see Figure 4-2), and would not be subject to changes in land use designations, it may be affected by the industrial uses that would be allowed within the LUO/LUE amendment area. The areas adjacent to the LUO/LUE amendment area could no longer be adequate for agricultural uses due to the potential for a Machinery Manufacturing plant to emit emissions that could affect agricultural resources. The plant could potentially have an adverse effect on air quality and groundwater in addition to the increased potential for fire, explosion, and hazardous materials leaks. These issues have the potential to cause land use compatibility conflicts.

**Impact Category:** Insignificant

**Thresholds of Significance Criteria:** 2

**Mitigation Measures:** The following measures are already done by the County as new development is proposed:

- A. Prior to approval of any future development within the LUO/LUE amendment area, the applicant shall submit the proposed project to the County Agricultural Commissioner for review and approval to determine if potentially significant impacts to agricultural resources would result, and to identify appropriate mitigation measures to reduce such impacts.
- B. ~~indicating~~ Indicate compliance with necessary buffers. The County's Agricultural Commissioner's office makes buffer determinations and other mitigation measures on a case by case basis considering all relevant factors. County wide standard or minimum setback distances are not used (Agriculture & Open Space Element, 1998).
- C. To minimize the impact to agricultural resources, the County shall require that any proposed industrial land use authorized in this area be required to maintain appropriate air emission reduction equipment per the requirements of the San Luis Obispo Air Pollution Control District (APCD).

#### **Residual Impacts**

By following the existing County process, impacts to agricultural resources would be less than significant.

#### **5.2.2.4 Cumulative Impacts**

As discussed in Section 8.2 of this EIR, cumulative projects include Caldwell Minor Use Permit, Loomis Minor Use Permit, and Troesh Land Use Ordinance Amendment, which would result in the development of two office buildings, a warehouse, and a commercial composting facility. These land uses would not result in any changes or adverse impacts to agricultural resources. Furthermore, the composting facility may have a beneficial impact to agricultural resources by providing a nearby source of fertilizer and soil amendment.

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