AGRICULTURE ELEMENT - PROPOSED REVISIONS

Page, 2-14, AGRICULTURAL GOALS (AG)

AG1: Support County Agricultural Production.

a. Support and promote a healthy and competitive agricultural industry whose products are recognized in national and international markets as being produced in San Luis Obispo County.

b. Facilitate agricultural production by allowing a broad range of uses and agricultural support services to be consistently and accessibly located in areas of prime agricultural activity.

c. Support ongoing efforts by the agricultural community to develop new techniques and new practices.

d. Develop agricultural permit processing procedures that are rapid and efficient. Do not require permits for agricultural practices and improvements that are currently exempt, with the exception of a groundwater offset program in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin. Keep the required level of permit processing for non-exempt projects at the lowest possible level consistent with the protection of agricultural resources, ~~and~~ sensitive habitats, and groundwater supply.

Page 2-16, AGRICULTURAL POLICIES (AGP)

To the maximum extent possible, the following policies, implementation measures and programs try to balance protection of open space resources and the needs of production agriculture, and minimize the impacts to ongoing production agriculture. It is the intent to **not** require permits for agriculturally-related projects that are currently exempt (with the exception of a groundwater offset program in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin), and to **keep** the required level of permit processing for non-exempt projects at the lowest possible level consistent with the protection of agricultural resources, ~~and~~ sensitive habitats, and groundwater supply. The policies and recommended implementation measures apply to discretionary land use permits for new development (see Glossary for definition of development) and proposed land divisions.

Page 2-22, AGP10: Water Conservation

a. Encourage water conservation through feasible and appropriate “best management practices.” Emphasize efficient water application techniques; the use of properly designed irrigation systems; and the control of runoff from croplands, rangelands, and agricultural roads.

b. Encourage the U.C. Cooperative Extension to continue its public information and research program describing water conservation techniques that may be appropriate for

agricultural practices in this county. Encourage landowners to participate in programs that conserve water.

c. In the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin, require new agricultural water use to be offset through mechanisms such as a water offset program.

Discussion: Land area, the water falling on it, and groundwater stored beneath its surface are inseparable in determining agricultural values and productivity in the County. Other than the land itself, water is the most precious resource for agriculture. Conserving water can benefit agriculture by reducing groundwater pumping. Uncontrolled runoff can contribute to soil loss, reduced water quality in streams, increased impact on riparian habitat, decreased opportunity for groundwater recharge and degradation of the general productivity of the watershed. The Paso Robles Groundwater Basin requires special conservation measures to ensure that groundwater levels do not drop significantly below historic levels.

Implementation:

1. Encourage farmers and ranchers to periodically conduct irrigation efficiency analyses, such as those provided by the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service mobile irrigation lab program, or an equivalent. If financially feasible, the County should consider funding assistance.

2. Encourage farmers to use the following best management practices in order to best promote the efficient use of water:

    a. Increased adoption of crop water status monitoring, such as soil moisture monitoring technology
    b. More precise irrigation scheduling
    c. Enhanced irrigation monitoring practices
    d. Use of tailwater return systems for any surface water application
    e. Use of covers or other evaporation reducing systems for agricultural irrigation ponds
    f. Use of wind machines for frost protection, rather than overhead sprinklers where feasible

3. The County Department of Agriculture should participate in educational efforts for farmers and the general public regarding water conservation. These efforts should be developed cooperatively by the Resource Conservation Districts, Consolidated Farm Services Agency, U.C. Cooperative Extension, and the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service. Educational efforts should utilize all available information and avoid duplication of effort. These efforts could include, but may not be limited to:

    a. Online and/or printed educational materials
    b. Expansion of “Ag in the Classroom” program
    c. Farm tours for elected and other key officials

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4. Conservation methods should also be applied to lands and facilities owned and operated by the County to set a positive example for water conservation.

5. County departments should facilitate the approval of water conservation, surface water retention, improvement of ground water recharge areas and artificial recharge structures by providing applicants for such structures with information identifying which local, state and federal agencies must be contacted regarding such projects.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Page 2-23, AGP11: Agricultural Water Supplies.

a. Maintain water resources for production agriculture, both in quality and quantity, so as to prevent the loss of agriculture due to competition for water with urban and suburban development.

b. Do not approve proposed general plan amendments or rezonings that result in increased residential density or urban expansion if the subsequent development **would adversely** affect: (1) water supplies and quality, or (2) groundwater recharge capability needed for agricultural use.

c. Do not approve facilities to move groundwater from areas of overdraft to any other area, as determined by the Resource Management System in the Land Use Element.

d. In the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin, require all groundwater users to conserve water through programs tied to permit applications.

Discussion: The purpose of this policy is to strongly promote agricultural uses and to preserve limited groundwater supplies. Where urban development uses groundwater supplies, surrounding agricultural uses are often eventually displaced. By maintaining groundwater supplies primarily for irrigated agriculture uses, the county can encourage continued and expanded agricultural uses. In addition, this could reduce the chances that urban and suburban development will diminish recharge, deplete agricultural water supplies, degrade water quality, or make those supplies uneconomical for agriculture to use.

Implementation:

1. The Department of Planning and Building should propose amendments to the guidelines for general plan amendments in Framework for Planning of the LUE to reference this policy as it applies to groundwater supplies.

Timeframe: 18 months from plan adoption.

2. The Department of Planning and Building should propose amendments to the LUO, CZLUO, ~~and~~ the Real Property Division Ordinance, and other Titles of the County Code, to establish standards to ensure that proposed land divisions, ~~and~~ discretionary land use permit projects, ministerial building projects, and new agricultural water use in

groundwater the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin that ~~for non-agricultural purposes in rural areas~~ do not adversely affect water supplies, watershed yields or water quality ~~for existing or expanded agricultural uses~~. The standards should be based on approved groundwater basin/resource capacity studies, or other studies done in connection with the environmental review process.

Timeframe: 24 months from plan adoption.

3. On a watershed basis, County Planning, Engineering and Agricultural Departments will prepare a proposed work program to conduct or facilitate preparation of up-to-date groundwater basin/resource capacity studies that identify water supplies and drainage requirements (i.e., future demand vs. delivery capacity, trends, watershed yields, safe yields, surface drainage channels and salt sinks) relating to the needs of agriculture and other uses. The proposed work program and subsequent studies will be prepared in consultation with the county Water Resources Advisory Committee, U.C. Cooperative Extension and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Timeframe: Proposed work program submitted to Board of Supervisors within 12 months of plan adoption.

4. Recommend to LAFCO denial of proposed annexations to incorporated cities or special districts which would adversely affect existing agricultural water supplies and which could be inconsistent with preceding implementation measures.

Timeframe: Ongoing through review of proposed annexations.

5. The county Environmental Health Division should initiate an information program to fully identify the potential beneficial uses and potential hazards of reclaimed water.

Timeframe: 24 months from plan adoption.

6. The County Engineering Department, Agriculture Department, U.C. Cooperative Extension, and production agriculture representatives should advise the Planning and Building Department on matters involving agricultural water supplies, demand and water quality effects on crops.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

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CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT - PROPOSED REVISIONS

Page 10.7, Policy WR 1.7 Agricultural operations

Groundwater management strategies will give priority to agricultural operations. Protect agricultural water supplies from competition by incompatible development through land use controls. In groundwater basins certified at LOS II or III for water supply, establish groundwater management strategies that consider all groundwater use, including groundwater used for agricultural operations.

Page 10.8, Implementation Strategy WR 1.7.1 Protect agricultural water supplies

Consider adopting land use standards, such as growth management ordinance limits, water offset programs for ~~non-agriculturally-related~~ proposed development ~~on certain rural areas~~, larger minimum parcel sizes in certain rural areas, and merger of substandard rural parcels, in order to protect agricultural water supplies from competing land uses.

Page 10.11, Policy WR 1.14 Avoid net increase in water use

Avoid a net increase in ~~non-agricultural~~ water use in groundwater basins that are ~~recommended or~~ certified at~~s~~ Level of Severity II or III for water supply. In addition, p~~P~~lace limitations on further land divisions in these areas and establish and implement water offset programs for all groundwater users until plans are in place and funded to ensure that the safe yield will not be exceeded.

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