



Section 5.11:

Agricultural Resources



5.11 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This section evaluates potential impacts to agricultural resources that could result from implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035.

5.11.1 REGULATORY SETTING

STATE

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

Maps of Important Farmlands are prepared by the California Department of Conservation as part of its Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). Important Farmland maps are prepared periodically for most of the State's agricultural areas based on information from the Natural Resource Conservation Service's soil survey maps, land inventory and monitoring criteria developed by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and land use information mapped by the California Department of Water Resources. These criteria generally are expressed as definitions that characterize the land's suitability for agricultural production, including physical and chemical characteristics of the soil and actual land use. Important farmland maps are generally updated every two years. The following provides descriptions for farmlands mapping categories.

- **Prime Farmland:** Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance:** Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
- **Unique Farmland:** Farmland of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include nonirrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Local Importance:** Lands of importance to the local agricultural economy, as determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.



- **Grazing Land:** Lands in which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.

In Riverside County, Farmland of Local Importance is defined as follows¹:

- Soils that would be classified as Prime and Statewide but lack available irrigation water.
- Lands planted to dryland crops of barley, oats, and wheat.
- Lands producing major crops for Riverside County but that are not listed as Crops grown on unique farmland. These crops are identified as returning one million or more dollars on the 1980 Riverside County Agriculture Crop Report. Crops identified are permanent pasture (irrigated), summer squash, okra, eggplant, radishes, and watermelons.
- Dairylands, including corrals, pasture, milking facilities, hay and manure storage areas if accompanied with permanent pasture or hayland of 10 acres or more.
- Lands identified by city or county ordinance as Agricultural Zones or Contracts, which includes Riverside City "Proposition R" lands.
- Lands planted to jojoba which are under cultivation and are of producing age.

California Land Conservation Act

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (*California Government Code* Section 51200 – 51297.4), commonly referred to as the Williamson Act, enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments which are much lower than normal because they are based upon farming and open space uses as opposed to full market value. Local governments receive an annual subvention of forgone property tax revenues from the State via the Open Space Subvention Act of 1971 (*California Government Code* Section 16140-16154).

LOCAL

City of Murrieta Development Code

Agricultural uses are provided “right to farm” protections from land use conflicts by the *City of Murrieta Development Code*, Section 16.18.040, Equestrian and Agriculture Preservation. The intent of this section is to preserve the City's rural equestrian and agricultural character and to protect equestrian facilities, kennels and agricultural operations as a high community priority while minimizing conflicts with new urban development. It includes requirements to notify prospective purchasers, residents and tenants of property adjoining or near agricultural

¹ California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, “Farmland of Local Importance,” downloaded from http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/mccu/Pages/map_categories.aspx, January 13, 2011.



operations, of the inherent conflicts associated with the purchase of the residence including the presence of chemicals, dust, light, noise, odors and traffic that may occur near agricultural operations. It also states that no agricultural or livestock use shall become a nuisance to adjacent land uses, when the use was not a nuisance at the time it was established.

5.11.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

FARMLAND

Murrieta’s economy was once based on agriculture, and there is still farmland within the City and the Sphere of Influence. *Exhibit 5.11-1, Important Farmland (2008)* shows the location of farmland types in the City and Sphere of Influence, including Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland. *Table 5.11-1, Farmland Types in Murrieta and Sphere of Influence (2008)* provides the acreage for each Farmland Mapping Category. *Exhibit 5.11-1* and *Table 5.11-1* are based on the Important Farmland maps prepared by the State in 2008. These maps include land that was used for agricultural production anytime in the four years before the maps were prepared. However, by 2009 the extent of land used for agricultural production within the City limits was far less than the farmland depicted in *Exhibit 5.11-1*.

**Table 5.11-1
Farmland Types in Murrieta
and Sphere of Influence (2008)**

Farmland Mapping Category	Total in Acres
City of Murrieta	
Urban Built Out Land	11,348
Grazing Land	1,540
Farmland of Local Importance	3,207
Prime Farmland	65
Farmland of Statewide Importance	28
Unique Farmland	81
Other Land	5,242
Sphere of Influence	
Urban Land	442
Grazing Land	1,164
Farmland of Local Importance	2,581
Other Land	1,155
Source: City of Murrieta GIS Data, December 2009.	



Most of the land classified as farmland in Murrieta is Farmland of Local Importance, concentrated in the southwest and northeast; or Grazing Land, primarily in the northeast. The majority of the Sphere of Influence is designated as either Farmland of Local Importance or Grazing Land. Several isolated parcels classified as Farmland of Statewide Importance or Prime Farmland are located in the southern portion of the City, west of I-15. Parcels classified as Unique Farmland are present in the northern area of the City.

WILLIAMSON ACT LANDS

To preserve agricultural uses, the Williamson Act established an agricultural preserve contract procedure by which counties or cities within California can tax landowners at a lower rate, in return for a guarantee that these properties will remain under agricultural production for a period of 10 years.

According to the California Department of Conservation, no Williamson Act encumbered properties are located within the City of Murrieta. However, approximately 58 acres of encumbered properties are located in the Sphere of Influence; refer to Exhibit 5.11-2, Williamson Act Farmland (2007). None of these contracts are in non-renewal status with the State. Of this land, 48 acres are designated as Prime Agricultural Land by the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program.

5.11.3 SIGNIFICANCE THRESHOLD CRITERIA

The issues presented in the Initial Study Environmental Checklist (Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*) have been utilized as thresholds of significance in this Section. Accordingly, agricultural resources impacts resulting from the implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 may be considered significant if they would result in the following:

- 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.
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.
- Involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

Based on these significance thresholds and criteria, the proposed General Plan 2035's effects have been categorized as either "no impact," a "less than significant impact," or a "potentially significant impact." Mitigation measures are recommended for potentially significant impacts. If a potentially significant impact cannot be reduced to a less than significant level through the application of mitigation, it is categorized as a significant unavoidable impact.



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5.11.4 PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

CONVERSION OF FARMLAND TO NON-AGRICULTURAL USE

- **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 COULD RESULT IN CONVERSION OF FARMLAND TO NON-AGRICULTURAL USE, INCLUDING LAND SHOWN ON THE 2008 FARMLAND MAPPING AND MONITORING PROGRAM, AS UNIQUE FARMLAND.**

Level of Significance Before Mitigation: Less Than Significant Impact.

Impact Analysis: The proposed General Plan 2035 has taken a focused development strategy that would be implemented through seven Focus Areas, with individualized approaches for each area. New growth associated with the proposed General Plan 2035 is primarily anticipated to occur within the five Focus Areas targeted for land use change. These five Focus Areas are generally near the freeways, around economic catalysts such as the Loma Linda University Medical Center-Murrieta and Murrieta Education Center that are expected to generate interest in further development. No land use changes are proposed for the remainder of the City.

Parcels identified as Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance do not fall within the boundaries of any of the proposed General Plan 2035 Focus Areas. Therefore, no impacts are anticipated to these types of farmland. However, parcels in the northern part of the City that are shown as Unique Farmland on the 2008 Important Farmland map fall within the boundaries of two Focus Areas. The Unique Farmland areas west of I-215 are currently within the City's Rural Residential zoning district. These parcels partially fall within the Clinton Keith/Mitchell Focus Area, and are designated Rural Residential in the proposed General Plan 2035, along with nearby parcels that buffer them from more intense uses to the east. Agricultural uses are a permitted use in the Rural Residential zoning district. Therefore, the proposed General Plan 2035 is not expected to result in conversion of these parcels to non-agricultural use; impacts are considered less than significant in this regard.

The Unique Farmland parcel east of I-215 is within the City's Business Park zoning district and is currently used as a plant nursery; in-pot nurseries are mapped by Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program as Unique Farmland regardless of underlying soil type². The nursery is a permitted use on this parcel under the City's current Development Code. The parcel lies in the North Murrieta Business Corridor Focus Area, and is designated as Commercial in the proposed General Plan 2035. Plant nurseries are a permitted use in several commercial zoning districts; depending on how zoning is implemented in this area, the plant nursery may be a non-conforming use. Development in the North Murrieta Business Corridor Focus Area may also result in pressure for this parcel to be developed with a different commercial use. However,

² Amy Klug, Research Analyst (GIS), California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, email communication, December 20, 2010.



because plant nurseries are allowed in the Rural Residential district and several non-residential zoning districts, the plant nursery could move its potted plants to another location in the City if it is displaced. Any new plant nurseries in the City would be considered to be new areas of Unique Farmland. Therefore, the proposed General Plan 2035 is not anticipated to cause a permanent loss of Unique Farmland; impacts are considered less than significant in this regard.

The 2008 Important Farmland map shows Locally Important Farmland throughout the City. However, as stated above, most of this land is not in agricultural production based upon City staff review of parcel records and field inspection, and therefore may not be eligible for inclusion on the Important Farmland maps expected to be released in 2011.

Under the proposed General Plan 2035, future development efforts are directed toward the Focus Areas, with an emphasis on encouraging additional office and business park uses in appropriate freeway-adjacent locations. Although most of the City is urbanized or urbanizing, large rural residential areas would remain, where agricultural uses are less subject to land use conflicts and development pressure. The proposed General Plan 2035 goals and policies in the Conservation and Land Use Elements support the protection of rural character and the continued potential for agricultural uses in these rural residential areas.

In addition to allowing agricultural activity in rural residential areas, the proposed General Plan 2035 policies encourage additional, small-scale urban agricultural opportunities to be created throughout the City. The focus of these policies is on improving Murrieta residents' access to fresh, locally grown produce, rather than on growing food for export out of the community. However, urban agriculture is an evolving industry and the proposed General Plan 2035 allows for commercial urban farming operations as well as food processing facilities that could be linked to those operations.

Through the proposed General Plan 2035, the potential for agricultural uses in rural residential areas would remain, and the expansion of agricultural uses in urbanized areas is encouraged. Therefore, impacts on farmland are considered to be less than significant.

Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035:

CONSERVATION ELEMENT

Goal CSV-10 Fresh food is grown locally and made available through multiple venues that maintain a link to the City's agricultural heritage and promote healthy eating.

Policies

CSV-10.1 Allow agricultural uses to continue in rural residential areas.

CSV-10.2 Consider ways to allow small-scale urban agriculture in parks, schools, and neighborhoods.



- CSV-10.3 Ensure that residents are permitted to grow fruits and vegetables in their yards, so long as there are not significant negative impacts to adjacent property owners.
- CSV-10.4 Encourage and support the use of public lands for community gardens and other food production facilities, when feasible.
- CSV-10.5 Support opportunities for local food production and access, such as farmers' markets, community gardens, harvest sharing programs, and community-supported agriculture programs.
- CSV-10.6 Encourage local farmers to sell fresh food locally.
- CSV-10.7 Allow public facilities such as schools, libraries, and community centers to be used as Community Supported Agriculture pick-up sites, where feasible.

LAND USE ELEMENT

Goal LU-2 A community that preserves its rural characteristics in appropriate locations.

Policies

LU-2.1 Provide for the keeping of horses and other livestock, as well as farming or agricultural operations, on appropriate larger lot residential property to preserve the community's heritage.

Goal LU-20 West of Warm Springs Creek, preserve the historic rural character of the Los Alamos Hills area by maintaining its unique environment rural style with low-density development and small rural roads while preserving natural features.

Policies

LU-20.6 Allow the keeping of personal livestock for both commercial and non-commercial purposes pursuant to the standards in the City's Development Code, and as may be modified through a Specific Plan.

LU-20.7 Allow commercial farms, tree crops and other agricultural uses on lots of at least 2.5 acres in size consistent with Los Alamos' long history as an agricultural community.

Mitigation Measures: No mitigation measures beyond the goals and policies identified in the proposed General Plan 2035 are required.

Level of Significance After Mitigation: Not Applicable.



ZONING AND WILLIAMSON ACT CONTRACTS

■ IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 COULD CONFLICT WITH EXISTING ZONING FOR AGRICULTURAL USES, OR A WILLIAMSON ACT CONTRACT.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation: No Impact.

Impact Analysis: The proposed General Plan 2035 would not involve direct modifications to existing zoning designations; however, zoning designations would be made consistent with General Plan land use designations following adoption of the proposed General Plan 2035. The City’s current *Development Code* does not include agricultural use zoning districts, but agricultural uses including commercial crop production are permitted in the Rural Residential, Estate Residential, and General-Industrial-A zoning districts; plant nurseries are permitted in some Commercial zoning districts. The proposed General Plan 2035 would maintain the current land use designations throughout the City, with the exception of the land use changes in the five of the seven Focus Areas. The proposed General Plan 2035 does not include any modifications to County agricultural zoning designations in the Sphere of Influence.

According to the California Department of Conservation, no properties located within the City are under Williamson Act contracts. Approximately 58 contiguous acres in the Sphere of Influence, which are located approximately 1 mile east and 1.5 miles north of the City limits, are under Williamson Act contract. Land use and zoning in the Sphere of Influence is under the jurisdiction of Riverside County. The proposed General Plan 2035 does not address land use in the Sphere of Influence, and therefore would not conflict with any Williamson Act contract.

Given that no properties are currently under Williamson Act contracts in the City, and that the proposed General Plan 2035 proposes no land use changes in the Sphere of Influence, no impacts would occur in this regard.

Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035: No goals or policies in the proposed General Plan 2035 pertain specifically to Williamson Act Contracts.

Mitigation Measures: No mitigation measures are required.

Level of Significance After Mitigation: Not Applicable.



5.11.5 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

- **DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL PLAN 2035 AND OTHER CUMULATIVE DEVELOPMENT COULD RESULT IN CUMULATIVELY CONSIDERABLE IMPACTS TO AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES.**

Level of Significance Before Mitigation: Less Than Significant Impact.

Impact Analysis: Future development projects in the City of Murrieta, the City's Sphere of Influence, County of Riverside, and the region could result in the loss of agricultural resources. Development in the region impacting agricultural resources designated as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, unique farmland, grazing lands, or farmland of local importance would be considered a significant impact. All these categories of agricultural land are currently located within the City.

No properties located within the City are under Williamson Act contracts. Although parcels in the Sphere of Influence are encumbered under such contracts, they would not be affected by the proposed General Plan 2035.

Through the proposed General Plan 2035, the potential for agricultural uses in rural residential areas would remain, and the expansion of agricultural uses in urbanized areas is encouraged. Therefore, implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would result in less than cumulatively considerable agricultural resource impacts.

Goals and Policies in the Proposed General Plan 2035: Refer to the goals and policies referenced above in this Section 5.11.

Mitigation Measures: No mitigation measures beyond the goals and policies identified in the proposed General Plan 2035 are required.

Level of Significance After Mitigation: Not Applicable.

5.11.6 SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

Agricultural impacts associated with implementation of the proposed General Plan 2035 would not occur or would be less than significant with compliance with and/or adherence to State and local regulations, and goal and policies in the proposed General Plan 2035. Therefore, no



significant unavoidable agricultural resources impacts would occur as a result of the proposed General Plan 2035.

5.11.7 SOURCES CITED

Amy Klug, Research Analyst (GIS), California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, email communication, December 20, 2010.

California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, “Farmland of Local Importance,” downloaded from http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/mccu/Pages/map_categories.aspx, January 13, 2011.