

4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

4.2.1 Introduction

This section of the EIR analyzes the potential physical environmental impacts from the implementation of the City of Simi Valley General Plan Update as these impacts relate to agricultural resources. Data used to prepare this section were taken from Soils, Minerals, and Agricultural section of the City of Simi Valley General Plan Update Technical Background Report (2007) and previous agricultural-related documentation prepared for the City of Simi Valley.

No comment letters addressing agricultural resources were received in response to the December 3, 2009, Notice of Preparation (NOP) circulated for the General Plan Update. Full bibliographic entries for all reference materials are provided in Section 4.2.5 (References) of this section.

4.2.2 Environmental Setting

Agricultural Production

Ventura County has a long history of agricultural production. Farming in Ventura County continues to be a major contributor to the nation's food supply as well as a vital component of the rural lifestyle that exists throughout much of the County. According to the Ventura County General Plan, the adoption of planning policies and regulations that identify and protect existing agricultural land would ensure the continued availability of these lands for agricultural uses (see Regulatory Setting, below). Even though agricultural production in Ventura County has remained fairly stable in terms of production over the last two years, agricultural use of land in Simi Valley is no longer a significant factor in the local economy or the Planning Area, which consists of the area within the Simi Valley City limits and its SOI. Vacant parcels and some outlying areas are used for grazing, dry farming, and some irrigated agriculture. Significant conflicts exist between agriculture and urban uses that prevent long-term agricultural use of areas adjacent to developed areas, including dust from cultivation, pesticide use, and other factors (City of Simi Valley 1988a). Urban development is confined to areas within the City Urban Restriction Boundary (CURB), unless Simi Valley voter approval is obtained. The CURB is shown in Figure 4.2-1 (Important Farmland and Williamson Act Lands).

State of California Department of Conservation Farmland Classifications

The California Department of Conservation has developed a Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program that classifies the different agricultural soil types related to their ability to sustain agricultural crops. The soil type classifications are: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, Urban and Built-up Land, and Other Land. The following is the Department of Conservation's definitions of its classifications:

Prime Farmland

Prime farmland has 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 of statewide importance is 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

Unique farmland consists of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated 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

This classification includes soils that are listed as prime or statewide that are not irrigated, and soils growing dryland crops--beans, grain, dryland walnuts, or dryland apricots.

Grazing Land

Grazing land is land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.

Urban and Built Up Land

Urban and built-up land is occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately 6 structures to a 10-acre parcel. Common examples include residential, industrial, commercial, institutional facilities, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, and water control structures.

Other Land

Other land is land not included in any other mapping category. Common examples include low-density rural developments, brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing, confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities, strip mines, borrow pits, and water bodies smaller than 40 acres. Vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is mapped as Other Land.

The majority of City land is categorized as “Urban and Built-Up Land” and “Other Land” as shown in Figure 4.2-1. Most of the City’s farmland is located in the northern and southern portions of the City in the hillside areas, and the majority of this farmland is classified as “grazing” or “other” land.

As noted, Prime Farmland has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. No land within the Planning Area is classified as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. There is a small pocket of Unique Farmland located in the southwestern portion of the City, south of Madera Road and just north of Bard Reservoir. This portion of land is currently used for agricultural purposes. However, it is zoned as RPD-Residential Planned Development, and is designated as Open Space under the existing General Plan.

Farmland of Local Importance is primarily located in the hillside area in the northern portion of the City, adjacent to grazing areas. Large sections of grazing land are also located in the western and southwestern portion of the City, in areas north and southeast of Bard Reservoir. These areas contain soil of the San

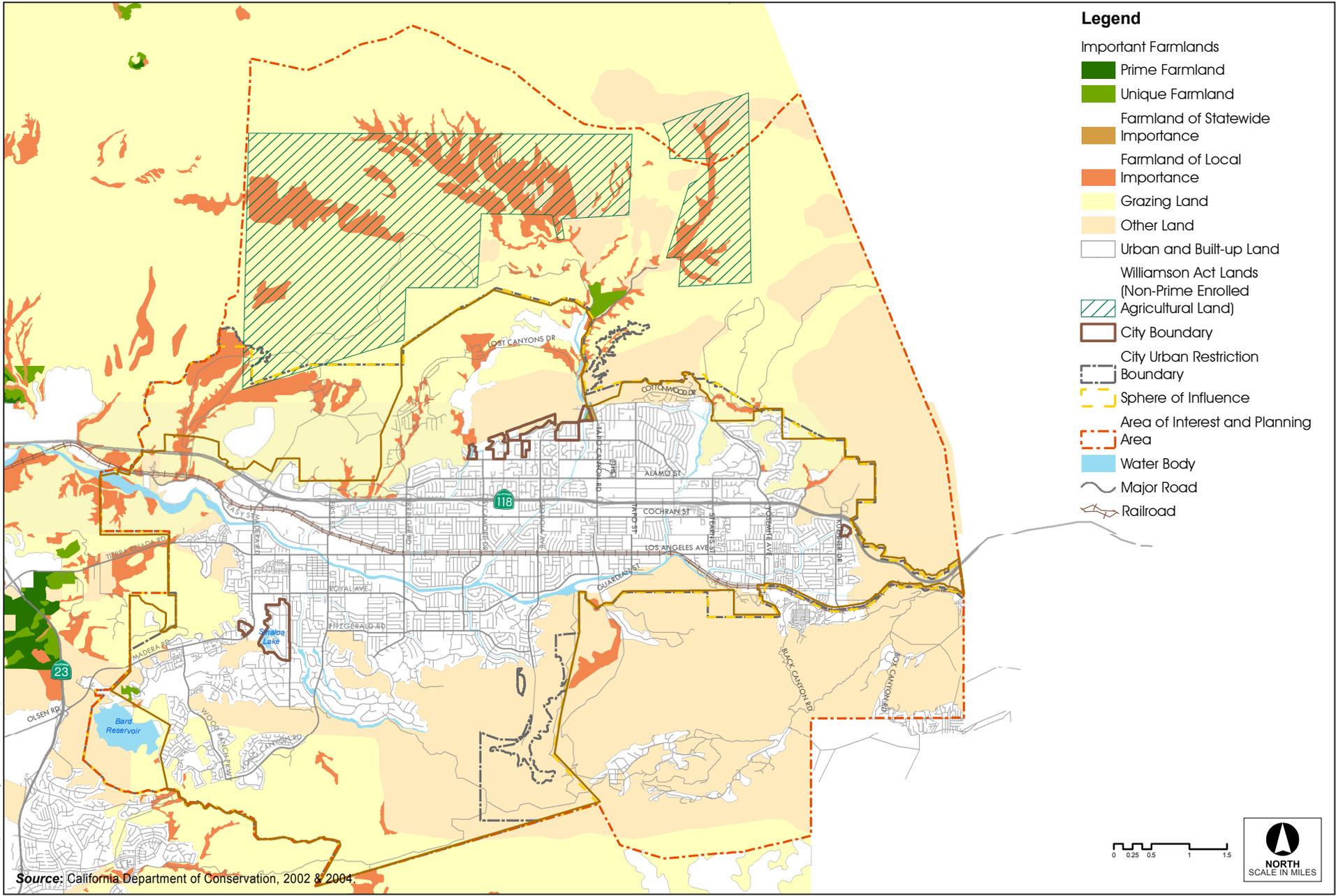


Figure 4.2-1
Important Farmland and Williamson Act Lands

Benito-Castaic-Calleguas association, used primarily as range, with few areas used for growing cultivated crops, grain, and citrus fruits.

Williamson Land Act Contracts

The California Land Conservation Act (LCA) of 1965, or Williamson Act (California Government Code Section 51200), recognizes the importance of agricultural land as an economic resource that is vital to the general welfare of society. Intended to assist the long-term preservation of prime agricultural land in the State, Williamson Act contracts provide the agricultural landowner with a substantial property tax break for keeping land in agricultural use. To be eligible for a contract, a parcel must be a legal lot of at least ten acres, and be considered Prime Farmland as defined by the LCA.

In Ventura County, the LCA Program is administered by the Ventura County Planning Division. In 2005, the County had 889 LCA (10-year) contracts and 56 Farmland Security Zone Act/LCA (20-year) contracts in the unincorporated area, for a total of approximately 128,780 acres under contract (VCRMA 2004). According to the Department of Conservation, the City of Simi Valley does not have any land subject to Williamson Act Contracts (CDOC DLRP 2006).

4.2.3 Regulatory Framework

■ State

California Code of Regulations (Title 3 Food and Agriculture)

California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 3, Sections 6000–6920 regulate the registration, management, use, and application of pesticides on agricultural lands. These regulations are enforced by the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office. Generally, specific regulations vary for each pesticide, its method of application, and use. However, Sections 6600 and 6614 contain some general regulations relating to the application of pesticide, as well as general standards of care and protection of persons, animals, and property.

■ Regional

Ventura County General Plan

The County has adopted various programs designed to preserve agriculture. Agricultural preservation has been integrated into overall land use planning strategy and consequently is a reciprocal beneficiary of many interagency regional land use planning and resource conservation programs. Specific County agricultural preservation programs include the following: (1) Agriculture Land Use Designation, which establishes an Agriculture designation for lands identified in the Important Farmlands Inventory and subjects all parcels to the Agricultural Exclusive (A-E) zone, and (2) Land Conservation Act Program, also known as the Williamson Act, which allows farmers to enter into a long-term contract (minimum of 10 years) to keep their land in exclusive agricultural use in exchange for a reduced tax assessment based on the agricultural value of the property (County of Ventura 2000). While lands under Williamson Act contract do not exist within City boundaries, areas within the northern portion of the City’s Area of Interest (AOI) in unincorporated areas of Ventura County are identified as Williamson Act lands.

Ventura County Save Open-Space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR) Ordinance

The County SOAR ordinance requires Countywide voter approval of any change to the County General Plan involving the “Agricultural,” “Open Space,” or “Rural” land use map designations, or any change to a General Plan goal or policy related to those land use designations. This ordinance limits the amount of agricultural land outside City boundaries but within the AOI that can be potentially converted to urban uses.

■ Local

Simi Valley City Urban Restriction Boundary (CURB) or SOAR Initiative

SOAR and CURB boundaries are the result of various Save Our Agricultural Resources (or in some instances Save Our Agricultural and Open Space Resources) initiatives that have been approved by the voters as ordinances for the County of Ventura and, to date, eight of the ten cities in the County, including Simi Valley. Each of the SOAR ordinances within Ventura County is slightly different and each is distinct.

Per the Simi Valley CURB, until December 31, 2020, the City of Simi Valley must restrict urban services (except temporary mutual assistance with other jurisdictions) and urbanization of uses of land to areas within the Simi Valley CURB. Urbanized uses of land are defined as any development that would require establishment of a new community sewer systems or the significant extension of existing community sewer systems, the creation of residential lots less than 10 acres, or establishment of non-agriculture or mineral-related commercial or industrial uses. Exceptions to this include completing roadways identified in the 1988 General Plan Circulation Element and construction of public potable water facilities, public schools, public parks, and other government facilities.

The Simi Valley CURB cannot be amended or altered prior to December 2020, except by a vote of the people. Exceptions to amendments include the provision of affordable housing to comply with state law if there is not enough existing residentially designated land available within the CURB to accommodate this development. The CURB is shown in Figure 4.2-1.

4.2.4 Project Impacts and Mitigation

■ Analytic Method

To determine whether agricultural lands would be affected by the General Plan Update, Williamson Act contract properties, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program–designated farmland, and any land zoned or designated for agricultural use according to local regulations were identified in the Planning Area. Where lands are designated for agricultural use, existing land uses were identified and if agricultural uses currently occur on those lands, the General Plan Update was reviewed for proposed changes to determine the significance of agricultural impacts associated with the General Plan Update.

■ Thresholds of Significance

The following thresholds of significance are based on Appendix G of the 2011 CEQA Guidelines. For the purposes of this EIR, implementation of the proposed project may result in a potentially significant impact if the proposed project would:

- 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

■ General Plan Policies that Mitigate Potential Impacts on Agricultural Resources

Policies and goals from the Community Development Chapter that would mitigate potential impacts on agricultural resources include the following. All General Plan policies are followed by a set of numbers in parentheses. These numbers reference applicable measures that will be undertaken by the City to implement the policy.

Policy LU-1.2 Development Location. Limit development to lands within the Simi Valley City Urban Restriction Boundary (CURB), as shown in Figure LU-1, thereby protecting existing agriculture, open space, viewsheds, wildlife, and watersheds surrounding the City from development impacts and limiting urban sprawl. (*Imp A-1, A-2, LU-6, LU-10, LU-18*)

Policy LU-22.2 Agricultural Uses. Require that agricultural land uses devoted to the growing of crops be located and managed to ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses. Agricultural land uses devoted to the raising or maintaining of livestock should be buffered from urbanized areas. (*Imp A-1, A-2, LU-1, LU-3, LU-6, LU-17, LU-18*)

■ Effects Not Found to Be Significant

There are no areas of the City that are zoned for agricultural use, nor are there any current Williamson Act contracts within the City. Thus, *no impact* would occur.

As shown on Figure 4.2-1 and as discussed above, the majority of land within the City is classified as Urban and Built up Land, Grazing Land, and Other Land. The small area of land in the southwest portion of the City, south of Madera Road and just north of Bard Reservoir is classified as Unique Farmland. This land is currently being used for agricultural purposes and is currently zoned as RPD-Residential Planned Development and is part of the Wood Ranch Specific Plan area. The existing General Plan designates this land as Open Space. The General Plan Update does not propose to change its current designation. Therefore, the conversion of this Unique Farmland would not occur as a result of the General Plan Update. Therefore, *no impacts* are associated with the conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural uses.

As discussed above, there currently are no land use designations or zoning classifications specifically for agricultural uses within the City. The few small areas where existing agricultural uses currently occur are zoned for non-agricultural uses. General Plan Policies LU-1.2 and LU-22.2 facilitate preservation of agricultural lands and ensure land use compatibility. The General Plan Update does not identify any changes in land use in these areas, since they are outside of any identified Study Area. Therefore, while the conversion to non-agricultural uses is likely to occur, it will not be a result of the General Plan Update. As a result, *no impacts* would occur.

■ Less-Than-Significant Impacts

No less-than-significant impacts have been identified with respect to agricultural resources.

■ Significant and Unavoidable Impacts

No significant and unavoidable impacts have been identified with respect to agricultural resources.

■ Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts are only addressed for those thresholds that have a project-related impact, whether it is less than significant, significant, or significant and unavoidable. If “no impact” occurs, no cumulative analysis is necessary to address that threshold.

4.2.5 References

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