

4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

4.2.1 Setting

California agriculture ranks first in the nation in productivity, and its 77,900 farms and ranches received a record \$46.4 billion for their products in 2013 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, California Agricultural Statistics, 2015). California produces over 400 commodities and nearly half of all U.S. grown fruits, nuts, and vegetables on its 25.5 million acres of farmland.

a. Countywide Agricultural Resources.

Production Value. The value of agricultural commodities produced in Tuolumne County was estimated at \$36.3 million in 2013, the latest year for which data are available (Tuolumne County Department of Agriculture, 2014). This production value exceeded the previous year's total of \$30.0 million by approximately 21%. Between 2005 and 2013, the annual value of agricultural commodities has ranged from approximately \$20 million to nearly \$40 million. Livestock and poultry produced the most revenue at \$17,410,000 in value, followed by timber at \$13,764,000. Table 4.2-1 summarizes agricultural revenue by type of agricultural product in Tuolumne County for the year 2013.

**Table 4.2-1
Tuolumne County Agricultural Summary**

Category	Total Gross Values
Livestock and Poultry	\$17,410,000
Timber	\$13,764,000
Field Crops	\$4,046,000
Fruit and Vegetables	\$666,000
Apiary and Nursery	\$285,000
Livestock and Poultry Products	\$155,000
Total	\$36,327,000

Source: Tuolumne County Department of Agriculture, 2013 Annual Crop Report, 2014.

Yearly changes in environmental conditions can affect agricultural productivity. Two major environmental events, the Rim Fire in the summer of 2013 and an ongoing drought, played a significant role in Tuolumne County production values (Tuolumne County Department of Agriculture, 2014). The Rim Fire burned thousands of acres of summer grazing range, while the drought reduced forage production on rangeland.

Agricultural Acreage. Currently 160,735 acres in unincorporated Tuolumne County are designated for Agricultural land use, which accounts for 10.80% of total land in the County. Grazing land comprises the majority of Agricultural land (approximately 104,471 acres).. In addition, approximately 121,020 acres are currently enrolled in Williamson Act contracts, of which about 14,785 acres are in a state of non-renewal pursuant to the Williamson Act. The



Williamson Act, including the non-renewal process, is discussed in greater detail in Section 4.2.1.b (Regulatory Setting).

Conversion of Agricultural Land. Rising land values and cost of inputs (water, fuel, fertilizer, etc.) have contributed to an increase in the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses throughout California as well as the intensification of agricultural land uses, whereby lower value products are replaced by high-value crops (e.g., grazing or dry farming replaced with row crops, orchards, or vineyards). Since 1984, nearly 1.4 million acres of agricultural land in California have been converted to non-agricultural purposes (California Department of Conservation [DOC], California Farmland Conversion Report 2008-2010, April 2014). From the 2006–2008 reporting period to the 2008–2010 period, the rate of conversion slowed from 203,000 acres (DOC, January 2011, Table C-3) to 168,000 acres statewide (DOC, April 2014, Table C-3). Because the DOC does not maintain data on the acreage of farmland in Tuolumne County, it is not possible to evaluate recent countywide trends in the conversion of important farmland. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) also maintains a national soils database on the Web Soils Survey, which catalogues indices of soil quality such as prime farmland and Capability Class; in Tuolumne County, however, this database only covers Stanislaus National Forest and Yosemite National Park and does not extend to the western foothills region. A comprehensive soil survey for Tuolumne County is not available.

b. Regulatory Setting.

State.

Land Conservation Act. Better known as the Williamson Act (California Administrative Code Section 51200 et seq.), the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 creates a legal arrangement whereby private landowners contract with local governments to voluntarily restrict land to agricultural and open space uses, protecting it from unnecessary or premature conversion to urban uses. In return, restricted parcels are assessed for property tax purposes at a rate consistent with their actual use rather than potential market value, which saves landowners from 20 percent to 75 percent in property tax liability each year.

Generally, Williamson Act contracts have an initial term of ten years, with renewal occurring automatically each year thereafter. The contracts run with the land and are binding on all succeeding landowners. Land must be in an agricultural preserve in order to enter into a Williamson Act contract. Agricultural preserves under Williamson Act contract contain at least 100 contiguous acres of agricultural land unless specific findings are made. According to the Tuolumne County Regulations for Implementing the California Land Conservation Act, the minimum acreages for land uses under each contract shall be the following:

- 160 acres for dry land grazing;
- 80 acres for dry land grazing used in combination with at least 16 acres of irrigated pasture, and for recreational or open space use combined with agricultural use excluding dry land grazing; and
- 40 acres for non-prime agricultural uses excluding dry land grazing, for a combination of prime and nonprime agricultural uses, and for recreational or open space use.



Non-renewal initiations are requested either by the landowner or the local government and are often filed in anticipation of converting farmland to other uses. Most contracted land is terminated through non-renewal. Upon the expiration of the contract, the restrictions are removed and the property tax assessment, which had been gradually increasing over the previous nine year non-renewal period, returns to full market value.

As shown in Figure 4.2-1, a large portion of western Tuolumne County is currently enrolled in Williamson Act contracts. This is primarily non-prime agricultural land, mapped in an olive green color, with pockets of land in non-renewal shown in orange.

County.

Right to Farm Ordinance. Where non-agricultural land uses, especially residential development, occur adjacent to agricultural land, agricultural operations may become the subject of nuisance complaints. Tuolumne County's "Right to Farm Ordinance," located in Chapter 5.20 of the Ordinance Code, is intended to reduce the loss of agricultural resources by limiting the circumstances under which agricultural operations may be considered a nuisance. Further, the Right to Farm Ordinance is intended to promote a "good neighbor policy" between agriculturalists and residents by advising purchasers and residents of nearby property of inherent potential problems such as sounds, odors, dust, and chemicals from agricultural operations. Neighbors also are notified that they should be prepared to accept such inconveniences or discomforts as a normal and necessary aspect of living in a county with a strong rural character and a healthy agricultural sector.

4.2.2 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds. An impact is considered significant if physical changes that could be facilitated by buildout of the General Plan Update would result in one or more of the following conditions, which are based upon the environmental checklist in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines:

- 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;*
- 3) *Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g));*
- 4) *Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use; and/or*
- 5) *Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.*

This section also addresses potential land use conflicts between urban and agricultural uses.



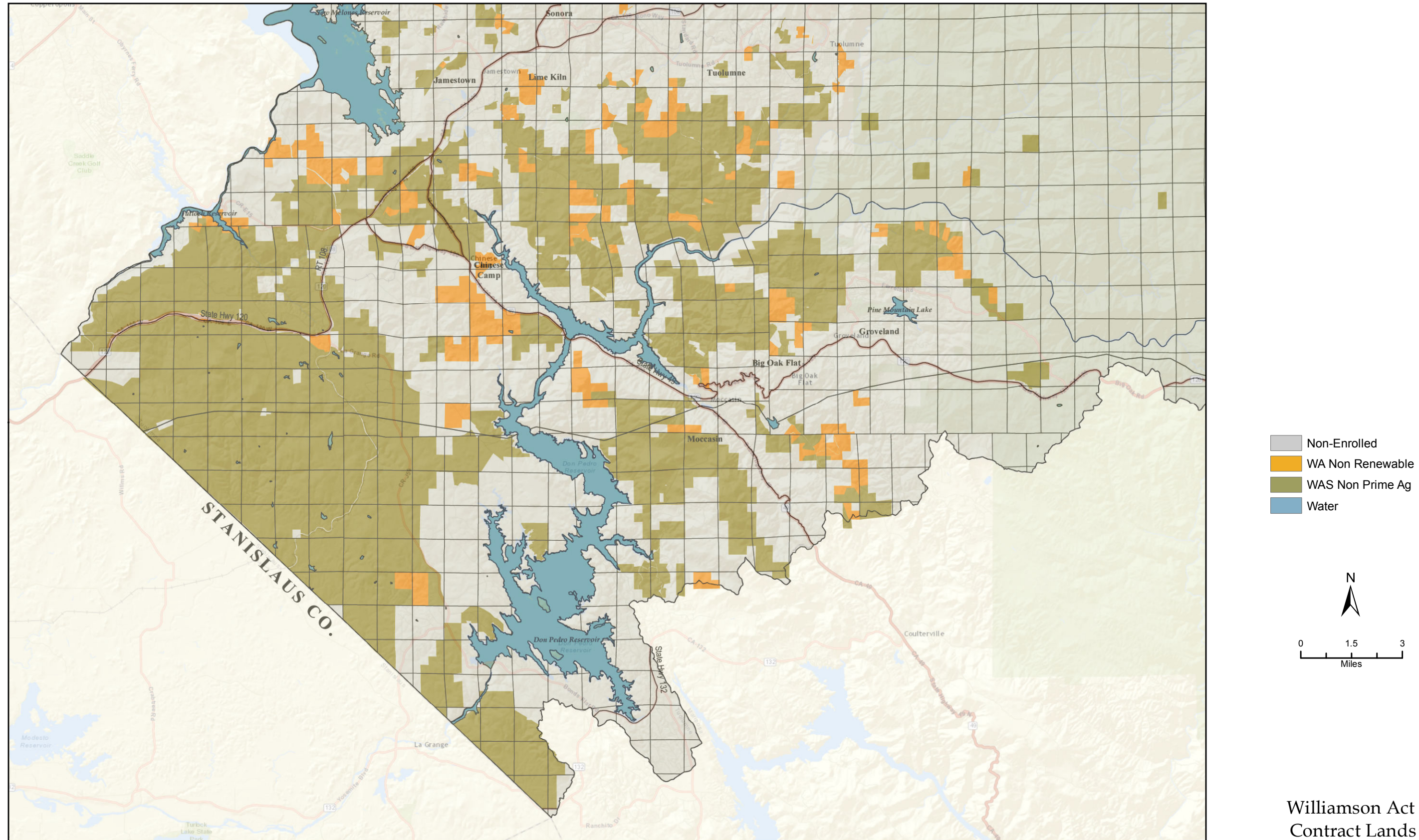
b. Project and Cumulative Impacts

Impact AG-1 The General Plan Update is intended to centralize urban development within communities and avoid disruption to agricultural lands. Although 4,509 acres of Agricultural land would be redesignated to other land uses, the majority of this area is already developed with residential uses. Proposed policies also would conserve agricultural resources. However, new development may result in conversion of Important Farmland. Impacts would be Class I, *significant and unavoidable*.

The General Plan Update has been formulated to reflect the Distinctive Communities Growth Scenario that the County's Board of Supervisors adopted in August 2012, which is intended to centralize urban development within communities and protect rural agricultural lands. While the General Plan Update would allow rural development primarily on the fringe of defined communities, such development would be clustered or grouped together to make the best use of infrastructure and avoid disruption to agricultural lands and environmentally sensitive areas. Therefore, the guiding vision of the General Plan Update would limit the loss of agricultural resources.

In accordance with this growth scenario, the proposed land uses in the updated Land Use Element designate where agricultural uses may occur in the unincorporated County. The General Plan Update designates a total of 156,226 acres of Agricultural land, a reduction of 4,509 acres (2.8%) from the 160,735 acres designated under the 1996 General Plan. The 4,509 Agricultural acres slated for redesignation consist of small parcels of five acres or less (and predominantly less than one acre) that are mostly located within or adjacent to existing communities. The majority of these parcels would be designated for residential uses and in most cases are currently developed with a residence. Of the remaining undeveloped parcels that the General Plan Update would redesignate for residential uses, it is anticipated that a portion of these parcels would stay agricultural in practice: the Large Lot Residential, Rural Residential, Homestead, and Estate Residential land use designations allow for low-density residential development while maintaining areas of open space dedicated to agricultural pursuits, grazing, or left undisturbed. Furthermore, the vast majority of agricultural land near communities in Tuolumne County is grazing land, not cultivated farmland that has greater value for crop production and could be classified as Important Farmland. However, because the DOC has not mapped Important Farmland in the County, it is not possible to quantify the conversion of Important Farmland that could result from redesignation of Agricultural land to residential uses.





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US Department of Conservation, 2013.

Williamson Act
Contract Lands

Figure 4.2-1
Tuolumne County

Although the existing Policy 11.A.1 in the Agricultural Resources Element directs the County to avoid conversion of agricultural lands that are designated for Agricultural use, the proposed Policy 11.A.2 would facilitate conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses. This policy would exempt the following types of parcels from policies to avoid conversion of Agricultural land:

- Areas designated Agricultural that are less than 160 acres and surrounded by land designated other than Agricultural or Public that is managed for open space uses; and
- Parcels that are less than 80 acres, located within 500 feet of a public water main, and adjacent to land designated High Density Residential, Medium Density Residential, Low Density Residential, Mixed Use, Neighborhood Commercial, General Commercial, or Heavy Commercial.

By allowing for development on certain agricultural parcels near urban uses, Policy 11.A.2 would direct conversion of agricultural lands to appropriate areas, but could potentially lead to conversion of Important Farmland.

The proposed project also includes amendments to Title 17 of the County's Ordinance Code, consistent with Policies 11.E.1 through 11.E.3 in the updated Agricultural Resources Element, which would expand the range of economic activities allowed on land zoned for agriculture. These amendments would allow agritourism activities that complement local agricultural production and special events that are "accessory to the agricultural use of the land." Specifically, the amendments to Title 17 would allow the following permitted uses in the Exclusive Agricultural, Thirty-Seven Acre Minimum (AE-37), Exclusive Agricultural, Eighty Acre Minimum (AE-80) and Exclusive Agricultural, One Hundred Sixty Acre Minimum (AE-160) zoning districts:

- One guesthouse per parcel;
- Agricultural marketing facilities or activities;
- Agricultural by-product processing facilities accessory to agricultural operations, including commercial composting facilities;
- U-pick operations;
- Bed and breakfast establishments within a permitted single-family dwelling, not to exceed six guest bedrooms;
- Farm stay, not to exceed six guest bedrooms;
- Guest ranch, not to exceed six guest bedrooms or accommodations for 20 persons, whichever is less;
- Educational workshops, craft demonstrations, or demonstration gardens accessory to the agricultural use;
- Commercial events;
- Seasonal activities such as crop mazes, pumpkin patches, and berry harvests;
- Petting zoo accessory to the primary agricultural use;
- Roadside stand up to 1,500 square feet in area;
- Energy-generating facilities accessory to the agricultural use; and
- Reservoirs for storage of water by a public utility.



These changes are also proposed in amendments to Tuolumne County’s regulations for implementing the Williamson Act in Resolution 106-04. The same additional uses also would be allowed in the General Agricultural zoning districts, except for guesthouses, roadside stands, energy-generating facilities, and reservoirs. All Residential Estate zoning districts also would allow agricultural processing facilities, U-pick operations, bed and breakfasts, private stables, and timber operations. On larger parcels zoned for Residential Estate use, additional uses would be permitted: agricultural marketing facilities; agricultural by-product processing facilities; U-pick operations; educational workshops, craft demonstrations, and demonstration gardens; and seasonal events. Moreover, the proposed amendments to Title 17 would increase the range of conditionally permitted agritourism activities.

The construction of additional agricultural facilities, such as guesthouses, roadside stands, energy-generating facilities, and composting facilities, could result in a minor loss of land used for agricultural production. However, the amendments to Title 17 would limit conversion of farmland by restricting the size of bed and breakfast establishments, farm stays, and roadside stands, and by requiring that other new agricultural facilities be accessory to the primary agricultural use. Furthermore, the proposed allowance for a broader range of productive activities on agricultural land would increase the economic value of land for agriculture and decrease long-term pressure for urban development, without substantially reducing the acreage of agricultural resources in Tuolumne County.

As listed below, the General Plan Update also has numerous goals, policies, and implementation programs that would reduce impacts related to the conversion of agricultural lands. The updated Land Use Element contains the following policies and implementation programs to conserve agricultural lands.

Policy 1.A.11 Promote the stability and productivity of agricultural lands, forest land and industries in Tuolumne County

*Implementation
Program 1.A.d Areas Between Defined Communities. Designate land between defined communities for non-urban land uses, such as agriculture, timber management, mining, public facilities, open space or rural residential development, to protect the individual character of each defined community and to maintain distinct boundaries between the communities.*

*Implementation
Program 1.A.m Conserve Agricultural and Forest Lands. Establish standards for the conversion of lands designated as Agricultural (AG) or Timber Production (TPZ) or other forest lands by the General Plan Land Use Diagrams to other land use designations.*

The updated Agricultural Resources Element contains the following goals, policies, and implementation programs to limit impacts to agricultural resources:

Policy 11.A.1 Avoid the conversion of agricultural lands from the Agricultural (AG) General Plan land use designation and compatible zonings.



<i>Goal 11.B</i>	<i>Stabilize agricultural use at the urban fringe.</i>
<i>Policy 11.B.1</i>	<i>Limit intrusion of urban development into agricultural areas.</i>
<i>Policy 11.B.2</i>	<i>Reduce economic pressure for conversion of agricultural land.</i>
<i>Policy 11.B.3</i>	<i>Limit the intrusion of growth-inducing public services, such as public sewer systems and potable public water, into agricultural areas.</i>
<i>Policy 11.B.4</i>	<i>Encourage development of non-agricultural lands before development of land designated Agricultural (AG) by the General Plan land use diagrams.</i>
<i>Implementation Program 11.B.a</i>	<p><i>Make Findings Prior to Approving Expansion of Urban Growth Boundaries. Make one of the following findings before approving expansion of urban growth boundaries established on the General Plan land use diagrams:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><i>1. The proposed development would not result in reduced productivity or increased costs of an agricultural operation.</i><i>2. The proposed development would not contribute to the deterioration of the rural setting, agricultural landscape, and operation practices of the adjacent agricultural areas.</i><i>3. The community's need for the development in the proposed location is so important as to justify an exception to the policies and implementation programs contained within this Element.</i>
<i>Implementation Program 11.B.c</i>	<p><i>Reduce Pressure to Convert Agricultural Land. Allow uses accessory to or that complement agricultural operations as permitted or conditional uses in order to make agricultural operations more profitable and reduce pressure to convert agricultural land.</i></p>
<i>Goal 11.E</i>	<i>Encourage the development of agritourism enterprises in Tuolumne County.</i>
<i>Policy 11.E.1</i>	<i>Encourage agritourism activities that complement local agricultural production and promote tourism.</i>
<i>Policy 11.E.3</i>	<i>Allow special events, such as weddings and other public gatherings, on agricultural lands when such events are accessory to the agricultural use of the land.</i>
<i>Policy 11.E.5</i>	<i>Allow farm stays, bed and breakfasts, guest ranches and similar opportunities for people to experience a rural lifestyle on agricultural lands.</i>
<i>Policy 11.E.6</i>	<i>Allow recreational uses on agricultural land where such uses are compatible with on-site agricultural enterprises.</i>



Implementation of the goals and policies of the General Plan Update listed above would reduce impacts from the conversion of agricultural lands. However, buildout under the General Plan Update has the potential to convert Important Farmland at the fringe of urban communities. New development could encroach on soils that could support agricultural production. Because the actual magnitude of conversion of Important Farmland cannot be determined, impacts would be potentially significant.

Mitigation Measures. No measures are available to mitigate the loss of agricultural lands, as the potential loss of Important Farmland cannot be quantified.

Significance after Mitigation. Impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact AG-2 Although the General Plan Update would redesignate 1,194 acres of timberland, this land would remain in timber production under the Public land use designation. Proposed policies also would protect timber resources from urban development. Impacts from the rezoning or loss of timber land would be Class III, less than significant.

The Distinctive Communities Growth Scenario that guides the General Plan Update would channel growth toward existing urban communities and away from rural areas, which would reduce pressure for development of productive timberland. Under the updated Land Use Element, 85,848 acres would be designated as Timberland, a reduction of 1,194 acres (1.4%) from the 87,042 acres designated under the 1996 General Plan. The acreage of designated Timberland would decrease due to publicly owned parcels in the eastern portion of Tuolumne County that would remain in timber production under the Public land use designation. Although this change in land use designation would cause a redesignation of 1,194 acres of existing timberland, it would not translate to a loss of productive timber resources. The remaining 85,848 acres of designated Timberland would still be available for timber production subject to Federal land management policies. Furthermore, the proposed amendments to Section 17.42.090 of the Tuolumne County Ordinance Code would encourage owners of timberland to rezone to timberland production (TPZ) by reducing the minimum allowable size of TPZ parcels from 160 to 37 acres. The proposed policies shown below also are intended to conserve timber resources.

The updated Natural Resources Element contains the following goals, policies, and implementation programs to conserve timber resources.

Goal 4.A Encourage the conservation and management of timberlands through incentive programs while conforming with California forest practice law.

Policy 4.A.1 Encourage retention of existing, and management of new timberlands by continuing to provide tax incentives to timberland owners, such as Timberland Production (TPZ) zoning or other State or Federal incentive programs that may be offered to conserve timberlands.



Policy 4.A.2 Encourage owners of timberlands which do not qualify for property tax incentives to continue timber production through such incentives as recognition programs, or other local, State or Federal incentive programs that may become available.

Policy 4.B.1 Discourage the development of incompatible land uses on lands adjacent to commercial timberlands.

Implementation Program 4.B.b Discourage Incompatible Land Uses on Lands Adjacent to Timberlands. Encourage the siting of proposed new urban residential development (HDR, MDR, LDR and MU land use designations) on land that is not adjacent to commercial timberlands.

With implementation of the goals and policies of the General Plan Update as listed above, impacts related to forest land and timber resources would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation is required.

Significance after Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

Impact AG-3 Future development under the General Plan Update could conflict with Williamson Act contracts on some properties. Impacts would be Class I, significant and unavoidable.

As shown in Figure 4.2-1, a substantial portion of western Tuolumne County is under Williamson Act contracts for the preservation of agricultural land. Properties under Williamson Act contract are generally located in rural areas, although a small number of properties occur in the vicinity of communities such as East Sonora, Jamestown, and Tuolumne. Based on the locations of Williamson Act parcels shown in Figure 4.2-1 and of the parcels with proposed land use changes, the General Plan Update would redesignate individual Agricultural parcels that are currently under Williamson Act contracts to residential uses.

By restricting the communities of Jamestown, Columbia, East Sonora, and Tuolumne to urban development boundaries, the General Plan Update would reduce potential conflicts with Williamson Act contracts and prevent the loss of agricultural resources to the extent feasible. In addition, the proposed policies shown below would recognize that more restrictive requirements under the Williamson Act prevail over conflicting development regulations and would allow accessory agritourism activities on properties under contract. This allowance for agritourism would increase the economic potential of agricultural land, reducing the pressure for property owners to file for non-renewal and convert their land to urban development. Even if property owners file for non-renewal, the Williamson Act would require that the full ten-year period of the contract elapse before it expires.

The updated Agricultural Resources Element contains the following policies and implementation programs which would mitigate potential conflicts with Williamson Act contracts:



Policy 11.A.4 *New development adjacent to land designated Agricultural (AG) by the General Plan land use diagrams shall provide a buffer on the development site so the new development would not be substantially detrimental to adjacent agricultural operations consistent with Implementation Program 11.A.d.*

Implementation Program 11.A.d *Provide Buffers from Adjacent Agricultural Land. Development proposed adjacent to land designated Agricultural (AG) by the General Plan land use diagrams shall provide a buffer from the agricultural land. The buffer shall be 200 feet in width and located on the development site. No residential or non-agricultural buildings may be erected in the buffer area as long as the adjacent land remains designated Agricultural (AG). The buffer may be reduced in width by the Board of Supervisors after considering the recommendation of the Agricultural Advisory Committee if such a reduction is determined appropriate based upon the topography, vegetation, roads or other physical features of the buffer area or other factors considered by the Committee.*

Policy 11.B.2 *Reduce economic pressure for conversion of agricultural land.*

Implementation Program 11.B.a *Make Findings Prior to Approving Expansion of Urban Growth Boundaries. Make one of the following findings before approving expansion of urban growth boundaries established on the General Plan land use diagrams:*

- 1. The proposed development would not result in reduced productivity or increased costs of an agricultural operation.*
- 2. The proposed development would not contribute to the deterioration of the rural setting, agricultural landscape, and operation practices of the adjacent agricultural areas.*
- 3. The community's need for the development in the proposed location is so important as to justify an exception to the policies and implementation programs contained within this Element.*

Implementation Program 11.B.b *Refer Applications to the Agricultural Advisory Committee. Refer applications for discretionary land use entitlements submitted to the Community Resources Agency proposing development of parcels that are zoned AE (AE-37, AE-80 or AE-160), are at least 37 gross acres in area and are located adjacent to land designated for Agricultural (AG) use to the Agricultural Advisory Committee for review and recommendation regardless of the General Plan land use designation of the parcel to allow an opportunity to comment on impacts to adjacent agricultural land.*

Implementation



- Program 11.B.c* *Reduce Pressure to Convert Agricultural Land. Allow uses accessory to or that complement agricultural operations as permitted or conditional uses in order to make agricultural operations more profitable and reduce pressure to convert agricultural land.*
- Policy 11.D.3* *Recognize that it is the express intent of this goal not to conflict with or supersede any conditions set forth under state laws or county ordinances or resolutions adopted pursuant to the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) of 1965, as amended. Where conflicts exist between development regulations and Williamson Act contracts, the more restrictive requirements will prevail.*
- Policy 11.E.2* *Allow agritourism activities on land zoned for agriculture (A or AE) or land that is subject to the Williamson Act land conservation program when such activities are accessory to the primary agricultural use of the land.*
- Implementation*
Program 11.E.b *Amend Williamson Act Regulations. Amend Resolution 106-04 to allow agritourism activities as compatible or conditional uses on land in the Williamson Act land conservation program when such activities are accessory to the primary agricultural use of the land.*

The proposed project would apply Policy 11.D.3 by amending Tuolumne County's regulations for implementing the Williamson Act in Resolution 106-04. In the event of conflicts between the County's implementing regulations or zoning ordinance with the Williamson Act, the amended regulations would ensure that the more restrictive of the regulations shall prevail. Policy 11.B.2 and its accompanying implementation programs also would reduce pressure to convert agricultural land, including land under Williamson Act. Implementation programs 11.B.a through 11.B.c would carry out this policy by requiring findings prior to the expansion of urban growth boundaries, referring applications for discretionary land use development on certain agricultural parcels to the Agricultural Advisory Committee, and allowing uses accessory to or complementary to agricultural operations as permitted or conditional uses in order to make operations more profitable.

Adherence to these proposed policies and compliance with the cancellation requirements defined by the Williamson Act program would reduce conflicts with Williamson Act land. In the long term, however, the proposed redesignation of Agricultural to residential land uses may facilitate development of agricultural properties that are currently under Williamson Act contract. Therefore, impacts would be potentially significant.

Mitigation Measures. Under the proposed land use plan that would allow urban development within communities and rural residential development in surrounding areas, no mitigation is available to prevent the potential loss of Williamson Act contracts.

Significance after Mitigation. Impacts would be significant and unavoidable.



Impact AG-4 The General Plan Update would alter the present land use pattern in portions of the County and may result in incompatibilities where urban and agricultural uses would directly abut each other. The proposed allowance of commercial events on agricultural land also may result in incompatibilities with nearby agricultural operations. However, land use conflicts would be reduced through the separation of potentially conflicting land uses, proposed policies, the review process for Conditional Use Permits, and application of the County's Right to Farm Ordinance. Therefore, impacts that would occur from urban development and commercial events would be Class III, *less than significant*.

By design, the General Plan Update would focus future development within existing communities and their urban development boundaries, reducing the placement of urban development adjacent to agricultural operations. However, at the fringe of urban communities, the General Plan Update would allow development adjacent to agricultural uses, especially grazing lands. As discussed under Impact AG-1, the General Plan Update would redesignate for various residential uses approximately 4,509 acres of small parcels that are currently designated Agricultural and mostly located within or adjacent to existing communities. Although the majority of these parcels are currently developed with residences, future development on any undeveloped parcels that would be redesignated for residential uses could result in the addition of residences adjacent to remaining agricultural land on the outskirts of communities. In addition, rural residential development could occur adjacent to agricultural operations. Development adjacent to agricultural uses may generate land use conflicts that could adversely affect both types of uses. In addition, the proposed allowance of commercial events on agricultural properties could generate land use conflicts with surrounding agricultural operations.

Impacts to Agricultural Uses. Residential development adjacent to agricultural land can have several negative impacts on the continuation of agricultural activities. For example, clearing and grading activities during construction could create excessive dust that could temporarily affect agricultural productivity (see Section 4.3, *Air Quality*). However, the emission of dust particulates during construction activity would be reduced by implementation of best management practices in Mitigation Measure AQ-1, which include watering of exposed soils as needed; enclosure, covering, or watering of exposed piles of construction debris; limiting vehicle speeds on-site; and securely covering all loads on haul/dump trucks. The introduction of urban development next to agricultural operations also could increase the risk of trespassing and vandalism on adjacent agricultural land.

The placement of residences adjacent to cultivated agriculture can have adverse economic impacts. Increased regulations and liability insurance to protect the farmer from adjacent urban uses cost time and money. Some farmers whose operations may be sensitive to nearby residences voluntarily limit their hours of operation and do not intensively use the portions of their property closest to urban uses, in effect establishing informal buffer zones on their own property. This has the effect of lowering crop yields, which can potentially affect the long-term economic viability of

the agricultural operation. This could ultimately cause the loss of agricultural production due to cessation of operations if the economic impacts become severe enough.

As discussed in Impact AG-1, the proposed amendments to Title 17 would allow special events, among other commercial accessory uses, on properties zoned for agricultural use. Commercial events such as weddings, festivals, and other public gatherings on agricultural land could adversely affect nearby agricultural uses by generating traffic on local roadways and noise from human conversations, music, and loudspeakers. However, potential impacts would be temporary and limited to the duration of special events. Furthermore, because commercial events would be conditional uses under Williamson Act contracts and on land zoned A-10, RE-5, and RE-10, potential impacts could be addressed during the review process for conditional use permits.

Impacts to Residential Uses. Those residing adjacent to agricultural land commonly cite odor nuisance impacts, noise from equipment, dust, and pesticide spraying as typical land use conflicts. Pesticide use on nearby crops and the suspension of dust from operation of equipment and earth-moving activities could create health concerns for residents. Additionally, odors from fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and equipment exhaust can be incompatible with residential uses. Agricultural equipment can generate substantial noise levels (see discussion and analysis Section 4.11, *Noise*). In addition, the development of residential uses near timber land could result in exposure to normal industry practices that generate dust, smoke, noise, chemical pesticides and herbicides, and truck traffic.

Residential development next to agricultural uses could expose these urbanized uses to the above referenced issues and also result in reduced property values along the interface with agricultural uses. In turn, these potential incompatibilities can result in the generation of nuisance complaints, which can in turn adversely affect agricultural resources. However, as discussed in Section 4.3, *Air Quality* and Section 4.11, *Noise*, the above issues have been determined not to be significant and/or can be adequately mitigated; accordingly, any such potential land use conflicts would be considered to have a less than significant impact on agricultural resources.

In addition, the County's Right to Farm Ordinance would help to protect on-going agricultural operations from nuisance lawsuits. This ordinance promotes a "good neighbor policy" between agriculturalists and residents by advising purchasers and residents of nearby property of inherent potential problems such as sounds, odors, dust, and chemicals from agricultural operations. Neighbors also are notified that they should be prepared to accept such inconveniences or discomforts as a normal and necessary aspect of living in a county with a strong rural character and a healthy agricultural sector.

The existing agricultural industries located within the plan area are a major contributor to the County's economy, and to protect the viability of this valuable industry, the General Plan Update locates more intensive residential uses away from agricultural land. The General Plan Update also contains policies and programs to install buffers between new development and adjacent agricultural land and to minimize potential conflicts by conditions of approval for new development. Application of the County's existing Right to Farm Ordinance to agricultural uses



(and the proposed application of this ordinance to timber production), would further reduce potential agricultural/urban conflicts.

The following implementation program in the updated Land Use Element would mitigate potential conflicts between urban and agricultural uses by designating areas for new urban residential development away from existing agricultural uses.

Implementation

Program 1.B.d

Land Uses Compatible with Residential Uses. Designate, where possible, land around existing residential neighborhoods for uses that are compatible with residences. Designate areas for new urban residential development away from existing incompatible land uses, such as agriculture, mining and industrial uses.

The updated Agricultural Resources Element includes the following goals, policies, and implementation programs to reduce conflicts between agricultural and urban uses.

Policy 11.A.4

New development adjacent to land designated Agricultural (AG) by the General Plan land use diagrams shall provide a buffer on the development site so the new development would not be substantially detrimental to adjacent agricultural operations consistent with Implementation Program 11.A.d.

Implementation

Program 11.A.d

Provide Buffers from Adjacent Agricultural Land. Development proposed adjacent to land designated Agricultural (AG) by the General Plan land use diagrams shall provide a buffer from the agricultural land. The buffer shall be 200 feet in width and located on the development site. No residential or non-agricultural buildings may be erected in the buffer area as long as the adjacent land remains designated Agricultural (AG). The buffer may be reduced in width by the Board of Supervisors after considering the recommendation of the Agricultural Advisory Committee if such a reduction is determined appropriate based upon the topography, vegetation, roads or other physical features of the buffer area or other factors considered by the Committee.

If the General Plan land use designation of the adjacent land is amended in the future to a designation other than Agricultural (AG), the need for the buffer area will be eliminated and the land use restrictions imposed pursuant to this program will cease at that time.

Goal 11.C

Minimize conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses.

Policy 11.C.1

Allow agriculturalists to manage their operations in an efficient, economic manner while minimizing conflict with non-agricultural uses.

Policy 11.C.2

Establish a buffer between agricultural land uses and residential/non-agricultural land uses. It shall be the obligation of the party seeking the



land use change to insure that a sufficient buffer is established between the parcels. The buffer shall favor protection of the agricultural land.

*Implementation
Program 11.C.c*

Minimize impacts to existing agricultural operations or use and resolve potential conflicts between agricultural operations and new development through conditions of approval made a part of such new development.

Goal 11.D

Manage agriculturally-related industrial and commercial uses in agricultural areas to facilitate local agricultural production.

Policy 11.D.1

Facilitate local agricultural production, by allowing the following agricultural support services where appropriate within agricultural areas:

- a. Those facilities which supply an agricultural need such as: farm supply, feed sales, agricultural product storage, or feed yards.*
- b. Those facilities which benefit agriculture by processing or packaging agricultural products such as: slaughtering facilities, packing sheds, canneries, wineries or sawmills.*
- c. Those facilities which benefit agriculture by converting agricultural by-products to other uses such as: livestock feed yards or alternative energy power generation, utilizing agricultural by-products.*
- d. Those facilities which process rock, aggregate gravel, or minerals.*

*Implementation
Program 11.D.a*

Agricultural Support Services in Agricultural Areas. Require agricultural support services allowed on land designated for Agriculture (AG) to conserve the rural setting, agricultural landscape and operational practices of the adjacent agricultural areas through conditions attached to development permits and other approvals for such agricultural support services.

In addition, the updated Natural Resources Element has the following implementation program to protect timber management and harvesting activities under the County's Right to Farm Ordinance:

*Implementation
Program 4.B.c*

Maintain Right to Farm Ordinance Relative to Timber Management. Maintain Chapter 5.20 of the Tuolumne County Ordinance Code, the Right to Farm Ordinance, so that it clearly includes timber management and harvesting activities within protected agricultural uses, in order to protect these timber activities, as well as the growing of timber.



1. *Maintain the "management and harvesting of timber" as an agricultural use in Section 5.20.030 of this ordinance to prohibit an existing timber management activity from being declared a nuisance when land uses in the surrounding areas change and a conflict arises, and*
2. *Maintain the "management and harvesting of timber" as an agricultural use in Section 5.20.040 of this ordinance to require a notice to purchasers of real property filing any grant deed or land sale contract with the County Recorder that discloses the potential for timber management activities in their area, and that normal timber practices may involve operations that inconvenience local residents or generate dust, smoke, noise, lawful and proper use of chemical pesticides and herbicides, and truck traffic, and that adjacent landowners should be prepared to accept such inconveniences or discomforts as a normal and necessary aspect of living in Tuolumne County which has a strong rural character and a healthy timber sector.*
3. *Maintain the grievance procedures in that Chapter 5.20 of the Tuolumne County Ordinance Code*

Adherence to these proposed policies and programs and compliance with the County's Right to Farm Ordinance would ensure potential agricultural/urban conflicts are less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation is required.

Significance after Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

