



CODE MODERNIZATION QUICK FACTS:

Draft Proposed Updates to Agricultural Policies in the General Plan and Agricultural Regulations in the County Code

Reason for Proposed Changes: Agricultural crops, agricultural practices and the challenges that farmers face have changed substantially since General Plan policies and agricultural regulations in the County Code were comprehensively updated more than thirty years ago. Important agricultural activities, such as technology-driven agricultural research and development, were not anticipated when policies were first developed. There has been a shift to farms that consist of multiple, leased properties. Diversified revenue and on-site marketing are frequently necessary for a farm to be viable. The public is interested in on-farm education, the “slow food” and farm to table movements, agricultural tourism, and supporting local agriculture.

The goal of the proposed revisions is to recognize these changes and support the evolving needs of the local agricultural economy while continuing to preserve agricultural land for agricultural use, as is consistent with voter approved Measure J. The relevant evolving needs were identified by farmers and the public through the Economic Vitality Study (EVS) process, which included multiple public and stakeholder meetings, and additional work with the Farm Bureau, Agricultural Policy Advisory Commission, the County Agricultural Commissioner and other stakeholders, some of which included public hearings. The Code maintains existing protections for agricultural land, including prohibitions against subdividing commercial agricultural land and converting agricultural land to non-agricultural land uses such as commercial development.

Key proposed revisions include the following:

- Allow for agri-tourism on land zoned Commercial Agriculture (CA) and Agriculture (A), including school visits, classes, farm dinners, and farm stays, only where ancillary to the agricultural use on the parcel. Larger or more frequent events require a discretionary permit.
- Simplified greenhouse regulations, both within and outside of the coastal zone.
- Broaden the range of agricultural support uses that may be allowed with discretionary use permits on land zoned Commercial Agriculture (CA) and Agriculture (A). This recognizes that activities that support agriculture, such as storing farm equipment, on-farm retailing of agricultural products, research and development, and agricultural services such as equipment repair and irrigation, are necessary for local agricultural operations to be viable. Support uses would be required to be secondary to the main farming use. For larger projects, additional requirements would apply to protect agricultural soils including evaluation of alternative sites, and use of second stories to minimize building footprint.
- To comply with state law, add farm employee housing for up to 12 units or 36 beds as a principally permitted use, while requiring a discretionary site development permit to minimize impacts to agricultural land. Consider larger housing projects for farm employees as a discretionary use, subject to use and site development permits to protect agricultural land.
- Add additional siting criteria for development to ensure protection of agricultural soils.
- Change accessory dwelling units (ADUs) on CA-zoned parcels from a discretionary to a principally permitted use, and allow them inside the Coastal Zone, consistent with accommodating the housing needs of agricultural households.