
3.2 - Agricultural Resources

This section describes and evaluates potential direct and indirect environmental impacts to agricultural resources that may result from the proposed City of Elk Grove Sphere of Influence Amendment (SOIA). Descriptions and analysis in this section are based on information provided by the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program and the United States Department of Agriculture. The Notice of Preparation identified the Agricultural Resources topical issue for evaluation (Sacramento Local Agency Formation Commission 2010).

3.2.1 - Environmental Setting

Project Site

The project site primarily contains agricultural uses with rural housing, light industrial, commercial, and public facilities. Agricultural-based General Plan land use designations account for approximately 97 percent of the land area within the SOIA Area.

Surrounding Agricultural Land Uses

West

Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, which protects scarce natural habitats and agricultural resources, forms the western boundary of the project site. Land uses within the Refuge include pastures and agricultural uses. Agricultural uses occupy the area immediately next to the proposed SOIA's western boundary. County of Sacramento land use designations west of the project site include Agricultural Cropland, Recreation, and Resource Conservation.

North

The project site is bounded by the City of Elk Grove to the north. Land uses immediately north of the SOIA Area include suburban residential uses and vacant land.

East

Rural residential and agricultural uses exist immediately east of the project boundary. Land in this area also lies within the Federal Emergency Management Agency 100-year floodplain. County of Sacramento land use designations east of the project site include Agricultural Cropland, Natural Preserve, and Resource Conservation.

South

Land uses in this area are similar to the adjacent agricultural land uses within the project site. County of Sacramento land use designations south of the project site include Agricultural Cropland.

Agricultural Economy

Agriculture provides jobs directly through farming operations and in related industries such as food processing, transportation, equipment sales, and other vertically integrated production processes. Agriculture in the Central Valley provides more than 10 percent of all jobs. The sub-region in the

Central Valley least dependent on agricultural jobs is the Sacramento Metropolitan sub-region, representing only 1.7 percent of all jobs. In 2007, total gross agricultural production was estimated at \$36.6 billion. Of that, the Sacramento metropolitan region accounted for \$1.46 billion, or approximately 4 percent of the State’s total production (Great Valley Center 2009).

Farmland Classifications

The California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) classifies cultivated agricultural land into four categories, listed below:

- **Prime Farmland:** Land with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain the long-term production of agricultural crops. These lands have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields.
- **Unique Farmland:** Land 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 climactic zones in California.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance:** Land similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to hold and store moisture.
- **Farmland of Local Importance:** Land of importance in the local agricultural economy, as determined by each county’s Board of Supervisors and a local advisory committee.

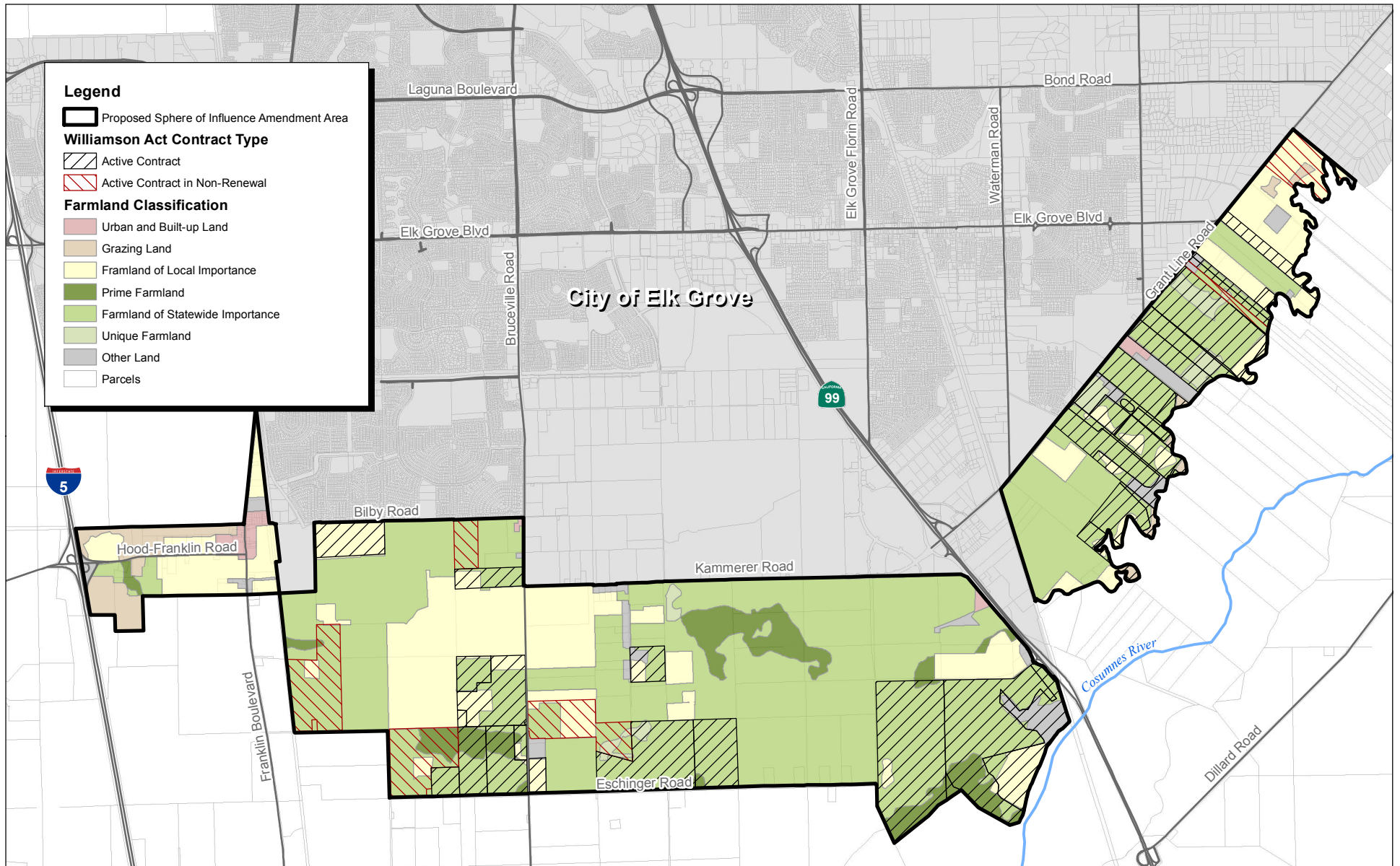
The project site contains land within all four farmland categories, as shown on Exhibit 3.2-1. Table 3.2-1 provides the allocation of farmland within the project site.

Table 3.2-1: FMMP Agricultural Lands

Farmland Category	Acres
Prime Farmland	446.40
Unique Farmland	122.40
Farmland of Statewide Importance	4,862.80
Farmland of Local Importance	1,928.70
Total	7,360.30
Note: Acreage calculations are based on the project boundary and source information provided by the City of Elk Grove. Source: Michael Brandman Associates, 2010.	

Williamson Act Contracts

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly called the Williamson Act, has long been the mainstay of Sacramento County’s agricultural land preservation program. The purpose of the Williamson Act is to secure a long-term landowner commitment to maintain farmland in agricultural uses in exchange for assessment of the land based upon use rather than market value.



Source: County of Sacramento, City of Elk Grove, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 2008.

According to the General Plan Agricultural Element, by 1989—20 years after the program’s initiation—253,240 acres representing 38 percent of the County were enrolled within the Williamson Act program. Table 3.2-2 shows the acreage of Williamson Act contracts.

Table 3.2-2: Williamson Act Contracts

Contract Status	Acres
Active Contract	2,474.00
Contract in Non-Renewal	548.80
Total	3,022.80
Note: Acreage calculations are based on the project boundary and source information provided by the City of Elk Grove and information obtained from the State of California. Source: Michael Brandman Associates, 2010.	

The project site contains several agricultural zoning classifications, listed in Table 3.2-3, which provides acreages of each within the project site.

Table 3.2-3: Agricultural Zoning

County Zoning	Acreage
A2 ^(a)	53
Agricultural-20 acres (AG20)	302
Agricultural-40 acres (AG40)	53
Agricultural-80 acres (AG80)	7,328
Agricultural Residential-2 acres (AR2)	18
Agricultural Residential-10 acres (AR10)	50
Total	7,804
Notes: ^(a) Multiple zoning designations: Agricultural-40 acres (AG40), Agricultural-80 acres (AG80) Source: City of Elk Grove, Sphere of Influence Amendment Application, 2010.	

3.2.2 - Regulatory Framework

State

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP)

The FMMP was established in 1982 to continue farmland mapping efforts initiated in 1975 by the Soil Conservation Service (since renamed Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS]) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Since 1980, the State of California has assisted the NRCS with completing its mapping in the State. The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program was created within the California Department of Conservation to carry on the mapping activity on a continuing basis and with a greater level of detail.

Williamson Act

The Williamson Act is a voluntary program that allows property owners to have their properties assessed on the basis of their agricultural production rather than at the current market value. The property owner is thus relieved of having to pay higher property taxes, as long as the land remains in agricultural production. The purpose of the Williamson Act is to encourage property owners to continue to farm their land, and to prevent the premature conversion of farmland to urban uses.

Upon approval of an application by the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors, the agricultural preserve is established, and the land within the preserve is restricted to agricultural and compatible uses for at least 10 years. Williamson Act contracts are automatically renewed annually for an additional 1-year period, unless the property owner applies for non-renewal or early cancellation. The Williamson Act also contains limited provisions for cancellation of contracts, and a substantial penalty for the cancellation is assessed.

Local

City of Elk Grove

Approval by LAFCo of this SOIA does not authorize any change in land use or governance. However, the proposed project would adjust the City of Elk Grove’s SOI and allow the City the opportunity to file an annexation request with LAFCo to annex lands within the SOIA Area. The City of Elk Grove General Plan establishes goals and policies to guide both present and future development within the City’s jurisdiction. Therefore, the City of Elk Grove’s General Plan policies directly or indirectly related to agricultural resources that may apply to potential future development in the SOIA Area are provided below.

- **Policy CAQ-2:** The loss of agricultural productivity on lands designated for urban uses within the city limits as of January 2004 is accepted as a consequence of the development of Elk Grove. As discussed in the Land Use Element, the City’s land use concept for the Planning Area outside the 2004 city limits anticipates the retention of significant areas of agricultural production outside the current city limits.
- **Policy CAQ-3:** The City of Elk Grove considers the only mitigation for the loss of agricultural land to consist of the creation of the new agricultural land in the Sacramento region equal in area, productivity, and other characteristics to the area that would be lost due to development. The protection of existing agricultural land through the purchase of fee title or easements is not considered by the City to provide mitigation, since programs of this type result in a net loss of farmland.
- **Policy CAQ-4:** While agricultural uses are anticipated to be phased out within the city limits, the City recognizes the right of these uses to continue as long as individual owners/farmers desire. The City shall not require buffers between farmland and urban uses, relying instead on the following actions to address the impacts of farming on urban uses:
 - **CAQ-4-Action 1:** Implement the City’s “Right to Farm” ordinance.

- **CAQ-4-Action 2:** Prospective buyers of property adjacent to agricultural land shall be notified through the title report that they could be subject to inconvenience or discomfort resulting from accepted farming activities as per provisions of the City's right-to-farm ordinance.

3.2.3 - Methodology

The City of Elk Grove General Plan was reviewed for applicable policies that apply to the project site. The analysis excluded changes in General Plan land use designations or zoning classifications, including pre-zoning, because neither of these changes is proposed or necessary for project implementation.

3.2.4 - Thresholds of Significance

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the State's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project, and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Would the project:

- a) 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?
- b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?
- c) 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))? (Refer to Section 7, Effects Found Not To Be Significant.)
- d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use? (Refer to Section 7, Effects Found Not To Be Significant.)
- e) 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?

3.2.5 - Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section discusses potential impacts associated with the development of the project and provides mitigation measures where appropriate.

Direct Farmland Conversion

Impact AG-1: The 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.

Impact Analysis

This impact will evaluate the potential for the proposed project to convert Important Farmland to non-agricultural use.

The proposed SOIA would expand the City's Sphere of Influence boundary to include agricultural lands classified as Farmland. The land use assumptions discussed in Section 2.0, Project Description, consider the SOIA Area to be potentially developed with urban uses that would result in a loss of 7,360.30 acres of Important Farmland. However, the proposed project by itself precludes direct development proposals or proposed changes to General Plan land use designations or zoning classifications that would have the potential to convert Farmland; therefore, direct conversion of Farmland would not occur. Since approval of an SOIA by LAFCo indicates that the Commission has designated the revised SOIA Area for future urbanization, impacts related to permanent conversion of agricultural uses to urban uses would be potentially significant. Potential indirect impacts of the proposed project could include the conversion of Williamson Act contract properties to urbanized, non-agricultural uses, as discussed below under Impact AG-3. Implementation of Mitigation Measure AG-1 would reduce the conversion of farmland, but impacts would remain significant and unavoidable.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

MM AG-1 At the time of submittal of any application to annex territory within the Sphere of Influence Amendment (SOIA) Area, the City of Elk Grove will identify lands to be set aside in permanent conservation easements at a ratio of one open space acre converted to urban land uses to one-half open space acre preserved and at a ratio of one agriculture acre converted to urban land uses to one-half agriculture acre preserved. Stacking of mitigation values will be permitted in order to serve multiple overlapping conservation purposes. The total acres of land conserved will be based on the total onsite open space and agriculture acreage converted to urban uses. Conserved open space and agriculture areas may include areas on the project site,

lands secured for permanent habitat enhancement (e.g., giant garter snake, Swainson's hawk habitat), or additional land identified by the City.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Significant and unavoidable impact.

Conflict with Agricultural Zoning

Impact AG-2: **The project would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.**

Impact Analysis

This impact will evaluate potential agricultural conflicts and loss of Williamson Act contract lands within the SOIA Area.

The proposed SOIA would expand the City's Sphere of Influence to include lands zoned for agricultural use. Should project approval occur, the existing Sacramento County agricultural zoning classifications identified in Table 3.2-3 would be retained. Any future development if pursued by the City of Elk Grove will require annexation of the subject parcel(s) and would be subject to its own CEQA review. Accordingly, land use and zoning designation would be revised in conjunction with the project applications.

There are approximately 24 parcels within the SOIA Area that are under Williamson Act contracts. These 24 contracts, which represent approximately 2,474 acres, are "on-going" contracts, meaning that the property owners have not applied to be released from the contracts. Removal of these properties from their Williamson Act contracts represents a potentially significant impact, as it would allow for the conversion of these properties to urban uses. The impact of removing these properties from their Williamson Act contracts is taken into account when considering the impacts associated with the loss of farmland within Sacramento County.

Land use compatibility impacts conflicting with the agriculturally zoned parcels in the SOIA Area would result from the construction of an intense urban development within the SOIA Area that could include residential, industrial, and commercial uses. Characteristics of existing agricultural operations include truck and tractor traffic; the presence of dust, litter, odors, outdoor lighting, garbage and equipment storage; pollution from idling diesel truck engines; and the presence and use of hazardous materials, emergency generators, and water well pumps.

These characteristics could trigger complaints from future residents within the SOIA Area and subsequent limitations placed on the existing agricultural and industrial operations in the area. For example, the use of hazardous materials, including the spraying and/or use of pesticides and fertilizers, and the plowing of fields may have to be discontinued because of liability and annoyance concerns. Limitations on agricultural businesses adversely impact their economic viability and the County's agricultural industry as a whole. Therefore, this is a potentially significant impact.

Agricultural Resources

Implementation of Mitigation Measure AG-1, as noted above, would lessen the severity of this impact, but would not reduce it to a less than significant level. As such, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

Implement Mitigation Measure AG-1.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Significant and unavoidable impact.

Indirect Farmland Conversion

Impact AG-3:	The project would not 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.
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Impact Analysis

This impact will evaluate the potential for the proposed project to create pressure to convert farmland to non-agricultural use as well as potential conflicts between future urban uses within the SOIA Area and continuing agricultural uses in adjacent areas.

The project site is surrounded by urban uses to the north, and agricultural land to the south, east, and west. The lands south, east, and west of the project site are designated Agricultural Cropland, Recreation and Resource Conservation, or Natural Preserve by the County of Sacramento.

The proposed project could indirectly result in the loss of approximately 7,360 acres of prime farmland, farmland of local and state importance, and unique farmland, as designated on the Sacramento County Important Farmlands map (California Department of Conservation) and as shown on Exhibit 3.2-1. These properties could be converted to urbanized, non-agricultural uses as an indirect effect of the project.

Land use compatibility impacts could occur between future urban development within the SOIA Area and agricultural uses in adjacent areas. Compatibility issues would most likely include noise, odor, lighting, and truck and tractor traffic as identified above. Future development of the SOIA Area would be required to comply with the City of Elk Grove's General Plan policies. The City's policies are based upon and would be no less restrictive than the intent and purpose of the existing County residential, commercial, and industrial policies, which require that future residential development recognize the presence of potentially incompatible land uses. Site design, screening, fencing, landscaping, setbacks, and buffers would be appropriate given existing and future land uses.

Mitigation Measure AG-3 would require the City to prepare a plan to avoid such land use compatibility conflicts prior to annexation. The plan shall include implementation of the City's Right to Farm Ordinance, site design, screening, fencing, landscaping, setbacks, and buffers, as well as procedures for addressing complaints from future SOIA Area residents. Performance standards shall also be included, such as the satisfactory resolution of all complaints within 30 days from the receipt of the complaint. Implementation of Mitigation Measure AG-3 would reduce potential indirect farmland conversion and land use compatibility impacts to a less than significant level.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

MM AG-3 At the time of submittal of any application to annex territory within the Sphere of Influence Amendment (SOIA), the City of Elk Grove shall prepare an agricultural land use compatibility plan for the SOIA Area to the satisfaction of LAFCo. The plan shall include implementation of the City's Right to Farm Ordinance, site design, screening, fencing, landscaping, setbacks, and buffers, as well as procedures for addressing complaints from future SOIA Area residents. Performance standards shall also be included, such as the satisfactory resolution of all complaints within 30 days from the receipt of the complaint.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less than significant impact.

