

**Sonoma County General Plan 2020**

**AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT**

**Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department  
2500 Ventura Avenue  
Santa Rosa, California 95403**

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# **AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 PURPOSE**

To acknowledge the importance of agricultural production in and to Sonoma County, an Agricultural Resources Element was added to the General Plan in 1989. The policies in this element have the same legal status as those in any State mandated element.

The Agricultural Resources Element defines agriculture as an industry which produces and processes food, fiber, plant materials, and which includes the raising and maintaining of farm animals including horses, donkeys, mules, and similar livestock. The purpose of the element is to establish policies to insure the stability and productivity of the County's agricultural lands and industries. The element is intended to provide clear guidelines for decisions in agricultural areas. It is also intended to express policies, programs and measures that promote and protect the current and future needs of the agricultural industry. If future technology, and/or enterprises, of the agriculture industry require alternative and yet unforeseen policies and implementation mechanisms, those should be consistent with the County's commitment to encourage the maintenance of a healthy agriculture sector of the County's economy.

### **1.2 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ELEMENTS**

General policy direction for land use decisions in agricultural areas is expressed in the Land Use Element, in both the agricultural use categories and in the Land Use Policies for the Planning Areas where the diversity of conditions in the County's agricultural areas can be recognized. Policies expressed in the Agricultural Resources Element are intended to apply primarily to lands designated within the three agricultural land use categories.

### **1.3 SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION**

This element has three sections:

1. an introduction
2. a set of issues with related goals, objectives, and policies
3. a set of implementing programs.

## 2. GOALS AND POLICIES RELATED TO AGRICULTURE

### 2.1 ASSIST IN THE MARKETING AND PROMOTION OF SONOMA COUNTY'S AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

Successful promotion and marketing of agricultural products grown in Sonoma County can both enhance the County's image and reduce economic pressure on farmers and ranchers to subdivide or convert the land to nonagricultural uses.

In the future, Sonoma County can expect challenges to its resources, particularly energy and water. Currently many farms, ranches and agricultural businesses are finding innovative ways to implement renewable resource programs and conserve energy, water and soil while increasing the economic viability of agriculture and thereby strengthening the local food system. Economic sustainability is being encouraged through niche marketing, direct marketing and evolving practices improving farm business management and intergenerational transfer of farms and ranches.



In recent years, the organic agricultural industry has been established and has grown rapidly. The success of this industry is projected to influence the agricultural economy in the coming decades. In addition to generating additional income, this industry has the advantage of providing diversity in the agricultural base of the County. This element establishes policies that will assist in promoting and marketing agricultural products grown or processed in Sonoma County.

**GOAL AR-1:** **Promote a healthy and competitive agricultural industry whose products are recognized as being produced in Sonoma County.**

**Objective AR-1.1:** Create and facilitate opportunities to promote and market all agricultural products grown or processed in Sonoma County.

**Objective AR-1.2:** Permit marketing of products grown and/or processed in Sonoma County in all areas designated for agricultural use.

**Policy AR-1a:** Permit a wide variety of promotional and marketing activities of County grown and processed products.\*

**Policy AR-1b:** The Economic Development Board shall promote agriculture as a major County industry.\*

**Policy AR-1c:** Consider the promotion of County agricultural products as a high priority in the disbursement of available funds, including the advertising budget.\*

**Policy AR-1d:** The marketing and promotion of agricultural products is highly dependent upon the public's continued confidence and perception that Sonoma County's agricultural products are raised in an environment which is not exposed to significant levels of hazardous materials. Accordingly, facilities which generate or handle significant amounts of hazardous material shall not be permitted on agricultural lands, nor shall they be established in other land use categories if it is determined that such use would adversely affect the marketing or promotion of the County's agricultural products.\*

**Policy AR-1e:** Encourage and support farms and ranches, both large and small, that are seeking to implement programs that increase the sustainability of resources, conserve energy, and protect water and soil in order to bolster the local food economy, increase the viability of diverse family farms and improve the opportunities for farm workers.\*

**Policy AR-1f:** Recognizing the benefits that a flourishing organic sector industry can provide, encourage and support those agricultural businesses seeking to use organic practices.\*

**Policy AR-1g:** Support the activities of the Sonoma County Agricultural Commissioner's Office and the Farm Advisors Office in promoting sustainable and organic agricultural production and encourage the exploration of possibilities for production of other diverse agricultural products.

## 2.2 STABILIZE AGRICULTURAL USE AT THE URBAN FRINGE

Rapid urban growth produces pressures on agricultural lands that tend to discourage new agricultural investment and uses, raises the price of land making purchase for farming unrealistic, and increases the likelihood of purchase for nonagricultural use. Competition occurs between urban and agricultural uses at the urban boundary. This creates a need for policies that a farmer can rely on to invest and reinvest in the agricultural production on his or her land.



- GOAL AR-2:** Maintain for the timeframe of this plan agricultural production on farmlands at the edges but beyond the Urban Service Areas, to minimize the influence of speculative land transactions on the price of farmland and to provide incentives for long term agricultural use.
- Objective AR-2.1:** Limit intrusion of urban development into agricultural areas.
- Objective AR-2.2:** Maintain the Urban Service Boundaries to protect agricultural lands at the urban fringe for continued agricultural production.
- Objective AR-2.3:** Limit extension of urban services such as sewer beyond the Urban Service Boundaries.
- Objective AR-2.4:** Reduce economic pressure for conversion of agricultural land to non agricultural use.

**Policy AR-2a:** Apply agricultural land use categories based on the capability of the land to produce agricultural products. Unless allowed by the Public Facilities and Services Element, limit extension of sewer service to these lands except by out-of-district agreement to solve a health and safety problem.\*

**Policy AR-2b:** Prepare a written report to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) regarding the consistency with the General Plan of any proposed changes in the sphere of influence or other urban boundaries for governmental entities that provide water or sewer services.\*

**Policy AR-2c:** Encourage LAFCO to consider the impacts of annexations on nearby agricultural lands, and to avoid expansion of spheres of influence or annexations onto agricultural lands outside of the designated Urban Service Areas.

**Policy AR-2d:** Use voluntary purchase or voluntary transfer of development rights programs to limit intrusion of residential development into agricultural lands. If these programs are used, amendments of the Land Use Map or rezonings shall not be used to lower density in anticipation of conferring transfer or purchase rights.\*



## 2.3 LIMIT INTRUSION OF NEW RESIDENTIAL USES INTO AGRICULTURAL AREAS

County zoning has permitted small residential lots to be clustered together, surrounded by large agricultural areas. This type of development withdraws some land from production, exposes a large perimeter area to conflicts, and threatens the interior areas. In intensively farmed areas, the disadvantages of the conflicts thus created outweigh the benefits. On extensive agricultural lands, however, creation of a limited number of small lots on marginally productive land leaves the largest parcel available for farming. As long as the number of small lots is kept to a minimum, conflicts may not be severe. The Agricultural Resources Element establishes policies that maintain parcels in agricultural areas predominantly in sizes that farmers would be willing to lease or buy for farming.



**GOAL AR-3:** Maintain the maximum amount of land in parcel sizes that a farmer would be willing to lease or buy for agricultural purposes.

**Objective AR-3.1:** Avoid the conversion of agricultural lands to residential or nonagricultural commercial uses.

**Objective AR-3.2:** Maintain, in those agricultural land use categories where small parcels may be permitted, the largest land area for agricultural use. Limit the number of clustered lots in any one area to avoid the potential conflicts associated with residential intrusion.

**The following policies, in addition to those in the Land Use Element, shall be used to achieve these objectives:**

**Policy AR-3a:** In the "Land Intensive Agriculture" category, new parcels shall not be created which are smaller than 20 acres.\*

**Policy AR-3b:** In considering subdivision of lands within "Land Extensive Agriculture" areas except those lands under Williamson Act contract, one-half or three of the permitted residential lots (whichever is greater), may be clustered. These clustered parcels may be as small as one and

one-half acres but no larger than ten acres. No future subdivision of these small parcels shall be permitted. All other parcels created in this category shall have a minimum lot size at least as large as the maximum density specified by the Land Use Map or Policy AR-8c, whichever is more restrictive. Lands subject to a Williamson Act contract are restricted from incompatible development under the County's rules for administration of Agricultural Preserves, as amended from time to time.\*

**Policy AR-3c:** Where clustered subdivision is permitted, separate clusters on one site from those on another site unless it is clearly demonstrated that the resulting lots will not create the appearance of, or conflicts associated with, residential intrusion. Any subdivision which proposes to cluster parcels of 10 acres or less shall locate those lots around existing residences on the parcel being subdivided. The intent of this policy is to minimize the impact of residential parcels on adjacent agricultural operations.\*

**Policy AR-3d:** Wherever practical, where clustered subdivision is permitted, use natural features such as ridge tops, creeks, and substantial tree stands to separate the small parcels from the farming areas.\*

**Policy AR-3e:** Where clustered subdivision is permitted, to the extent allowed by law, place an agricultural easement in perpetuity on the residual farming parcel(s) at the time that the subdivision occurs. The easement shall be conveyed to the County or other appropriate non profit organizations.\*

**Policy AR-3f:** Avoid amendments of the land use map from an agricultural to a non agricultural use category for the purpose of allowing increased residential density which may conflict with agricultural production.

**Policy AR-3g:** Develop regulations restricting the size and extent of non agricultural development on agricultural lands to be included in the Development Code.

## 2.4 MITIGATE CONFLICTS BETWEEN AGRICULTURAL AND NON-AGRICULTURAL USES IN DESIGNATED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AREAS

Both on the urban fringe and in the midst of agricultural areas, parcelization has occurred which has resulted in residential use being the primary use of the land. Complaints about noise, odors, flies, spraying and similar "nuisances" attendant to agricultural practices have discouraged and sometimes prevented farmers from managing their operations in an efficient and economic manner. Not only do residents complain about aspects of farming operations, but residential areas often directly affect the operations. For example, residential sites can become a sanctuary for pests which could damage adjacent crops. Clear policy is needed for County decision makers to balance the needs of the farmer with the concerns of his or her many residential neighbors.



The Agricultural Resources Element establishes policies that support the needs and practices of agriculture as the highest priority in areas designated for agricultural use.

**GOAL AR-4:** Allow farmers to manage their operations in an efficient, economic manner with minimal conflict with nonagricultural uses.\*

**Objective AR-4.1:** Apply agricultural land use categories only to areas or parcels capable of the commercial production of food, fiber and plant material, or the raising and maintaining of farm animals including horses, donkeys, mules, and similar livestock. Establish agricultural production as the highest priority use in these areas or parcels. The following policies are intended to apply primarily to lands designated within agricultural land use categories.

**The following policies, in addition to those in the Land Use Element, shall be used to achieve this objective:**

**Policy AR-4a:** The primary use of any parcel within the three agricultural land use categories shall be agricultural production and related processing, support services, and visitor serving uses. Residential uses in these areas shall recognize that the primary use of the land may create traffic and agricultural nuisance situations, such as flies, noise, odors, and spraying of chemicals.\*

**Policy AR-4b:** Apply agricultural zoning districts only to lands in agricultural land use categories to implement the policies and provisions of the Agricultural Resources Element.\*

**Policy AR-4c:** Protect agricultural operations by establishing a buffer between an agricultural land use and residential interface. Buffers shall generally be defined as a physical separation of 100 to 200' and/or may be a topographic feature, a substantial tree stand, water course or similar feature. In some circumstances a landscaped berm may provide the buffer. The buffer shall occur on the parcel for which a permit is sought and shall favor protection of the maximum amount of farmable land.\*

**Policy AR-4d:** Apply the provisions of the Right to Farm Ordinance to all lands designated within agricultural land use categories.\*

**Policy AR-4e:** Recognize provisions of existing State nuisance law (Government Code Section 3482.5).\*

**Policy AR-4f:** Anticipated conflicts between a proposed new agricultural use and existing agricultural activities shall be mitigated by the newer use or application.\*

## 2.5 REGULATE THE LOCATION AND INTENSITY OF AGRICULTURE RELATED SUPPORT USES IN AGRICULTURAL AREAS

Given its broad diversity, Sonoma County agriculture requires a variety of support activities that are available in close proximity to production sites. The determination of which support uses belong on agricultural lands involves their connection to agriculture, potential for conflicts, the size, scale and adaptability of the use, and the amount of land lost to farming. Policies are needed to permit on agricultural lands those agriculture-related uses which support agriculture without undermining production activities.



Policies for support activities should also balance the need for such uses with the continued preservation of the rural character and agricultural diversity of the County, and should support products grown in Sonoma County over those produced elsewhere. The substantial growth in the wine industry during the last decade has, for example, resulted in a trend towards larger processing facilities, facilities that may appear more industrial than rural in character. In addition, the apparent increase in the reliance of County processing facilities upon raw agricultural products imported from outside Sonoma County highlights the importance of demonstrating "connection" to local production in order to avoid County agricultural lands becoming defacto "industrial lands."

**GOAL AR-5:** Facilitate agricultural production by allowing agriculture-related support uses, such as processing, storage, bottling, canning and packaging, and agricultural support services, to be conveniently and accessibly located in agricultural production areas when related to the primary agricultural production in the area.\*

**Objective AR-5.1:** Facilitate County agricultural production by allowing agricultural processing facilities and uses in all agricultural land use categories.

**Objective AR-5.3:** Ensure that agriculture-related support uses allowed on agricultural lands are only allowed when demonstrated to be necessary for and proportional to agricultural production on site or in the local area.

**Objective AR-5.3:** Ensure that agriculture-related support uses allowed on agricultural lands are only allowed when demonstrated to be necessary for and proportional to agricultural production on site or in the local area.

**Policy AR-5a:** Provide for facilities that process agricultural products in all three agricultural land use categories only where processing supports and is proportional to agricultural production on site or in the local area.\*

**Policy AR-5b:** Consider allowing the processing of non viticultural agricultural products where the processing is demonstrated to support projected or new agricultural production, provided that the processing use is proportional to the new production on site or in the local area.\*

**Policy AR-5c:** Permit storage, bottling, canning, and packaging facilities for agricultural products either grown or processed on site provided that these facilities are sized to accommodate, but not exceed, the needs of the growing or processing operation. Establish additional standards in the Development Code that differentiate between storage facilities directly necessary for processing, and facilities to be utilized for the storage of finished product such as case storage of bottled wine. Such standards should require an applicant to demonstrate the need for such on-site storage.\*

**Policy AR-5d:** Define "agricultural support services" as processing services, maintenance and repair of farm machinery and equipment, veterinary clinics, custom farming services, agricultural waste handling and disposal services, and other similar related services.\*

**Policy AR-5e:** Only permit agricultural support services that support local agricultural production consistent with the specific requirements of each of the three agricultural land use categories. Insure that such uses are subordinate to on-site agricultural production and do not adversely affect agricultural production in the area. Consider the following factors in determining whether or not an agricultural support service is subordinate to on-site agricultural production:

- (1) The portion of the site devoted to the service as opposed to production.
- (2) The extent of structure needed for the service as opposed to production.
- (3) The relative number of employees devoted to the support service use in comparison to that needed for agricultural production.
- (4) The history of agricultural production on the site.
- (5) The potential for the service facility to be converted to non agricultural uses due to its location and access.\*

**Policy AR-5f:** Use the following guidelines for approving zoning or permits for agricultural support services:

- (1) The use will not require the extension of sewer or water,
- (2) The use does not substantially detract from agricultural production on-site or in the area,
- (3) The use does not create a concentration of commercial uses in the immediate area, and
- (4) The use is compatible with and does not adversely impact surrounding residential neighborhoods.\*

**Policy AR-5g:** Local concentrations of any separate agricultural support uses, including processing, storage, bottling, canning and packaging, agricultural support services, and visitor-serving and recreational uses as provided in Policy AR-6f, even if related to surrounding agricultural activities, are detrimental to the primary use of the land for the production of food, fiber and plant materials and shall be avoided. In determining whether or not the approval of such uses would constitute a detrimental concentration of such uses, consider all the following factors:

- (1) Whether the above uses would result in joint road access conflicts, or in traffic levels that exceed the Circulation and Transit Element's objectives for level of service on a site specific and cumulative basis.
- (2) Whether the above uses would draw water from the same aquifer and be located within the zone of influence of area wells.
- (3) Whether the above uses would be detrimental to the rural character of the area.

In cases where the proposed processing use would process only products grown on site, such use would not be subject to this concentration policy.\*

## 2.6 REGULATE THE LOCATION AND INTENSITY OF VISITOR SERVING USES WITHIN AGRICULTURAL AREAS

The benefits and potential adverse impacts of visitor serving uses vary by diversity of the agricultural industry in Sonoma County. It is important to recognize that agricultural tourism directly promotes the sale of agricultural products. Activities such as special events attract customers, build a customer base, market products, and build customer loyalty. However, the economic benefits of agricultural tourism must be balanced against associated impacts such as increased traffic, particularly in areas such as in Sonoma Valley or along routes where multiple visitor serving uses may be hosting events at the same time. In addition, visitor serving uses must supplement agricultural production, not replace it.



Wine tasting is an important promotional component of the viticulture industry, yet the people who come to enjoy the wine country may create a conflict with necessary practices of land intensive farming. This "people versus practices" conflict suggests a limit to tourist activities in vineyard areas, most of which are sufficiently close to communities that have available sites for such visitor services as lodgings and restaurants.

In extensive agricultural areas, some conflicts between visitors and agricultural practices are less severe due to the greater amount of land available to separate the activities. In these areas, small scale lodgings and some outdoor recreational uses could promote the agricultural activity and provide a secondary income source for the farmer or rancher without hindering the primary use of the land.

The Agricultural Resources Element promotes the County's agricultural industry by establishing policies which allow specific, limited visitor serving uses in agricultural areas.

**GOAL AR-6:** Allow new visitor serving uses and facilities in some agricultural areas but limit them in scale and location. These uses must be beneficial to the agricultural industry and farm operators and compatible with long term agricultural use of the land.\*

**Objective AR-6.1:** Give the highest priority in all agricultural land use categories to agricultural production activities. Visitor serving uses shall promote agriculture and enhance marketing of Sonoma County agricultural products, but shall be secondary and incidental to agricultural production.

**Objective AR-6.2:** Permit visitor serving uses in all agricultural land use categories if they support and do not adversely affect the agricultural production activities of the area. Bed and breakfast inns of five or fewer rooms, and campgrounds of up to 30 sites, are permissible recreational uses only in the "Land Extensive Agriculture" and "Diverse Agriculture" categories, if they do not adversely affect the agricultural production activities of the area.

**Objective AR-6.3:** Develop a pilot event coordination program for the Sonoma Valley Planning Area that provides for monitoring and scheduling of special events on agricultural lands and for agriculture related events on other lands so as to minimize the adverse cumulative impacts of such uses, particularly in areas where agriculture related support uses and/or visitor serving uses are concentrated.

**The following policies, in addition to those of the Land Use Element, shall be used to achieve these objectives:**

**Policy AR-6a:** Permit visitor serving uses in agricultural categories that promote agricultural production in the County, such as tasting rooms, sales and promotion of products grown or processed in the County, educational activities and tours, incidental sales of items related to local area agricultural products, and promotional events that support and are secondary and incidental to local agricultural production. Limit recreational uses to the "Land Extensive Agriculture" and "Diverse Agriculture" categories, specifically to bed and breakfast inns and campgrounds of 30 or fewer sites.\*



**Policy AR-6b:** Except as allowed by Policy AR-6a, prohibit new restaurants and lodging. Recognize existing restaurants or lodging facilities and those which were approved prior to adoption of this plan, but limit their expansion or intensification.\*

**Policy AR-6c:** Nonagricultural land use categories shall not be applied to lands surrounded by agricultural land use categories for purposes of permitting visitor serving or recreational uses or facilities.\*

**Policy AR-6d:** Follow these guidelines for approval of visitor serving uses in agricultural areas:

- (1) The use promotes and markets only agricultural products grown or processed in the local area.
- (2) The use is compatible with and secondary and incidental to agricultural production activities in the area.
- (3) The use will not require the extension of sewer and water.
- (4) The use is compatible with existing uses in the area.
- (5) Hotels, motels, resorts, and similar lodging are not allowed.
- (6) Activities that promote and market agricultural products such as tasting rooms, sales and promotion of products grown or processed in the County, educational activities and tours, incidental sales of items related to local area agricultural products are allowed.
- (7) Special events on agricultural lands or agriculture related events on other lands in the Sonoma Valley Planning Area will be subject to a pilot event coordination program which includes tracking and monitoring of visitor serving activities and schedule management, as necessary, to reduce cumulative impacts.\*

**Policy AR-6e:** Recreational facilities for off-road vehicles of any size shall not be permitted within any agricultural land use category.\*

**Policy AR-6f:** Local concentrations of visitor serving and recreational uses, and agricultural support uses as defined in Goal AR-5, even if related to surrounding agricultural activities, are detrimental to the primary use of the land for the production of food, fiber and plant materials and may constitute grounds for denial of such uses. In determining whether or not the approval of such uses would constitute a detrimental concentration of such uses, consider all the following factors:

- (1) Whether the above uses would result in joint road access conflicts, or in traffic levels that exceed the Circulation and Transit Element's objectives for level of service on a site specific and cumulative basis.
- (2) Whether the above uses would draw water from the same aquifer and be located within the zone of influence of area wells.
- (3) Whether the above uses would be detrimental to the rural character of the area.\*

**Policy AR-6g:** Define in the Development Code compatible visitor serving uses such as tasting rooms, sales and promotion of products grown or processed in the County, educational activities and tours, incidental sales of items related to local area agricultural products, and promotional events which support and are incidental to local agricultural production, and define their permissible sizes and intensities. \*

**Policy AR-6h:** Revise existing regulations to allow farm homestays in agricultural areas.\*

## 2.7 HOUSING FOR FARM WORKERS AND FARM FAMILY MEMBERS

Efficient management of agricultural production activities requires adequate numbers of employees to be housed on both a seasonal and a permanent basis. Farm related housing issues involve the location, amount and type of housing for seasonal employees, permanent employees and farm family members. The Agricultural Resources Element establishes policies to allow limited amounts of housing to meet the various needs of farm workers, farm operators and farm families in addition to permitted residential density. It is coordinated with the Housing Element which also establishes policies and programs that will support needed housing opportunities to assist farming operations.



**GOAL AR-7:** Support efficient management of local agricultural production activities by the development of adequate amounts of farm worker and farm family housing in agricultural areas.

- Objective AR-7.1:** Encourage farm operators to provide sufficient housing in addition to housing permitted by applicable density for permanent and seasonal agricultural employees and for family members to maintain agricultural production activities.
- Objective AR-7.2:** Locate agricultural employee housing where it promotes efficiency of the farming operation and has minimal impact on productive farmland.
- Objective AR-7.3:** Assist nonprofit organizations or agencies in their efforts to establish a program to provide safe and adequate housing for farm workers.
- Objective AR-7.4:** Permit a limited number of farm family housing units in addition to the number of dwellings allowed by the density.

**The following policies, in addition to those of the Land Use and Housing Elements, shall be used to achieve these objectives:**

**Policy AR-7a:** Permit permanent employee housing in addition to permitted density according to the needs of a particular sector of the agricultural industry. Express in the Development Code specific criteria to establish the number of agricultural employee units.\*

**Policy AR-7b:** Permit one additional dwelling unit in addition to permitted density for members of the farm operator's immediate family in the "Land Extensive Agriculture" category, or in the "Land Intensive Agriculture" category if a Williamson Act Contract is in effect. Farm family dwelling units shall not be subdivided from the primary agricultural parcel, shall generally be located close to the main unit, and shall be occupied only by a member of the family engaged in the farming operation.\*

**Policy AR-7c:** Work with lending institutions to develop ways to finance housing construction without encumbering the entire farm and without requiring subdivision.

**Policy AR-7d:** Assist the Community Development Commission and other appropriate agencies in developing funding and programs for farm worker housing.

**Policy AR-7e:** Allow clustering of agricultural employee housing on a portion of a parcel or a noncontiguous parcel under the same ownership if the units are closer to the primary unit than to the property line.

**Policy AR-7f:** Permit housing for seasonal workers as needed to serve the agricultural industries of the area if it does not necessitate the extension of sewer or water service inconsistent with the

Public Facilities and Services Element. This housing may be constructed to the minimum standards acceptable under State law and as allowed under PF-1f, PF-1g, PF-1h, and PF-1i.\*

**Policy AR-7g:** Allow temporary housing, including temporary sanitary and cooking facilities, for seasonal farmworkers during harvest season.\*

**Policy AR-7h:** Encourage County agencies to establish appropriate standards and pre-approved plans for temporary, seasonal, and dormitory housing.

## **2.8 ASSIST IN STABILIZING FARMERS' ECONOMIC SITUATION**

As with any business, investment in agriculture must earn a reasonable return for it to continue. Yet, many uncontrollable factors, including weather, yields, and prices, cause incomes from farming to vary greatly year to year. At the same time, a farmer's home and business are tied together financially. This combination of factors creates pressure which undermines the stability of the agricultural use. Policies are needed to create and support incentive programs, stabilize the farmer's economic situation, and maintain the land in agriculture.

**GOAL AR-8:** Assist in formulating programs that could provide alternative sources of capital for agricultural production without selling or encumbering the farmland as collateral. These measures include, but are not limited to, voluntary programs for purchase and transfer of development rights.

**Objective AR-8.1:** Continue participation in the Williamson Act and Farmland Security Zone programs.

**Objective AR-8.2:** Participate with wastewater generators to establish programs for agricultural reuse of recycled water in a manner which would be economically beneficial to agriculture and which would assure that the quantity and quality of the recycled water is appropriate for the intended use.

**Objective AR-8.3:** Encourage formulation of programs and evaluate alternative funding sources which offer financial incentives to the farm owner to reduce reliance on subdivision and sale of land to raise operating capital.

**The following policies, in addition to those of the Water Resources Element, shall be used to achieve these objectives:**

**Policy AR-8a:** Encourage the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District and other agencies to sponsor a variety of on going educational programs that assist the farmer in financial planning and to provide technical assistance where appropriate.\*

**Policy AR-8b:** Encourage programs for promotion and marketing of agricultural products grown in the County.

**Policy AR-8c:** Subdivision of any Williamson Act contracted lands shall not result in any new parcel less than 10 acres in size for Type 1 preserves or 40 acres in size for Type 2 preserves, or the established minimum lot size, whichever is more restrictive.

**Policy AR-8d:** Make any purchase or transfer of development rights program for agricultural lands a voluntary program.

**Policy AR-8e:** Prepare a transfer of development rights proposal for consideration by the Board of Supervisors.

**Policy AR-8f:** Encourage the use of recycled water through participation in reuse programs and the establishment of wastewater irrigation districts.

**Policy AR-8g:** Protect and improve the quality of recycled water and ensure the quantity used is appropriate for the agricultural use.

**Policy AR-8h:** To the extent feasible, foster agricultural diversity by providing information to the agricultural industry through the Economic Development Board, UC Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Commissioner, Farm Bureau, and other agricultural organizations.

## 2.9 STREAMLINE PERMIT PROCESSING FOR AGRICULTURAL USES IN DESIGNATED AGRICULTURAL LAND USE CATEGORIES

Obtaining permits to construct an agricultural facility is time consuming and expensive to many farmers. In agricultural land use categories, streamlining the permit processing to focus on health, safety and environmental issues would assist farming. The Agricultural Resource Element establishes policies to streamline permit processing for agricultural uses and facilities, while assuring that essential public health and safety concerns are addressed. An essential element of this streamlining can be accomplished by



providing dedicated permit assistance to applicants and prescribed, low-cost standards for agricultural uses.

**GOAL AR-9:** Provide agricultural permit processing procedures that are rapid and efficient.

**Objective AR-9.1:** Establish permit processing procedures that will simplify and shorten the decision making process for permits on agricultural lands.

**Objective AR-9.2:** Provide and expedite permitting assistance to the agricultural industry.

**Objective AR-9.3:** Promote rural character in the design of agriculture related support uses on agricultural lands.

**The following policies shall be used to achieve these objectives:**

**Policy AR-9a:** Allow concurrent processing of multiple permits for agricultural facilities.

**Policy AR-9b:** Consider barns and similar agricultural support structures on agricultural lands as part of the scenic environment not requiring design review approval except where local design review exists by community choice established in an adopted Specific plan, Area plan or Local Area Development Guidelines or where a State Scenic Highway designation has been approved by the Board of Supervisors and by the State of California.

**Policy AR-9c:** Establish procedures and standards in the Development Code to distinguish those agricultural uses and activities which may be approved by administrative action and to expedite the processing of permits for agricultural and agriculture related uses.

**Policy AR-9d:** Approve administratively temporary use permits for special events if the requirements of all appropriate agencies have been met.

**Policy AR-9e:** Streamline permitting for temporary use permits for farmworker housing if the requirements of all appropriate agencies have been met.

**Policy AR-9f:** Maintain provisions for agriculture exempt structures, subject to limitations on the size, occupancy and use of such structures.

**Policy AR-9g:** Limit permit conditions of approval for agricultural uses to those related to the proposed project unless health or safety issues must be resolved regarding the entire operation.

**Policy AR-9h:** Revise County Codes and Design Guidelines for discretionary agricultural support uses on agricultural lands in order to apply them so as to reduce or minimize urban style improvements and requirements for these uses, such as standards for parking, impermeable surfaces, lot coverage, etc.

## 2.10 AQUACULTURE AND THE COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY

Aquaculture and the fishing industry produce a food source and have needs similar to land based agricultural operations. Policy is needed to treat the support facilities of the fishing industry that relate to food production or harvesting in the same manner as those of other agricultural production.



- GOAL AR-10:** Provide for the raising, harvesting and production of fish in the same manner as the harvesting and production of agricultural products.
- Objective AR-10.1:** Allow aquaculture and its related facilities and activities in all agricultural areas.
- Objective AR-10.2:** Provide opportunities for development of support facilities for the fishing industry on appropriate lands.
- Objective AR-10.3:** Promote products of the fishing industry in the same manner as agricultural products.

The following policies, in addition to those in the Open Space and Resource Conservation Element, shall be used to achieve these objectives:

**Policy AR-10a:** Permit aquaculture and related facilities, including fish processing, in the same manner as other agricultural production uses.

**Policy AR-10b:** Allow support facilities for the fishing industry, including but not limited to equipment storage, processing facilities, and canneries, on lands designated for agricultural land use adjacent to the Urban Service Boundary of Bodega Bay. If the facility or use requires urban services, permit extension of such services on lands adjacent to the Urban Service Boundary only for that purpose.

## 2.11 THE HORSE INDUSTRY

The horse industry has a rich history and tradition in Sonoma County. Horses play an important role in many aspects of life, including farm and ranch work, timber harvest, riding, packing, shows and racing. Policy support is needed in order to assure that horses and agriculture related equestrian facilities are explicitly recognized as agricultural uses. Equestrian uses conducted primarily for recreational or other non agricultural uses are not considered agricultural uses in this context.



**GOAL AR-11:** Provide for the raising of horses in the same manner as the production of other agricultural products.

**Objective AR-11.1:** Allow the raising of horses and related facilities and activities in all agricultural areas.

**Objective AR-11.2:** Provide opportunities for the development of support uses for the horse industry on appropriate lands, consistent with best management practices.

**The following policy shall be used to achieve these objectives:**

**Policy AR-11a:** Permit raising of horses and related facilities in the same manner as other agricultural production uses.

## 3. AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

### **Agricultural Resources Program 1: Revisions of Agricultural Zoning District Regulations**

**Program Description:** Rewrite the agricultural zoning districts and other relevant sections of the Sonoma County code to reflect accurately the policies of the Agricultural Resources Element (Policy reference: Sections 2.5 and 2.6).



### **Agricultural Resources Program 2: Subdivision Ordinance Regulations in Agricultural Areas**

**Program Description:** Prepare an amendment to the Subdivision Ordinance providing findings for approval of clustered residential lots in the "Land Extensive Agriculture" and "Diverse Agriculture" categories, requiring a long term protective easement when clustered subdivision has occurred and providing subdivision conditions to minimize conflicts and maximize long term agriculture protection (Policy reference: AR-3b, 3c, 3d, 3e).

### **Agricultural Resources Program 3: Right to Farm Ordinance**

**Program Description:** Continue to implement the Right to Farm Ordinance which describes normal farm practices expected to occur in agricultural areas and insures the right of the farmer to continue such practices subject to appropriate health and safety standards. The ordinance shall specify that it applies only to areas designated with agricultural land use categories. A summary of the ordinance shall be mailed annually to all property owners with tax bills (Policy reference: AR-4d).

### **Agricultural Resources Program 4: Transfer of Development Rights Proposal**

**Program Description:** Prepare a voluntary transfer of development rights proposal establishing requirements and procedures for transfer of development rights from certain agricultural areas to specified receiving areas. Receiving areas may be jointly identified by a city through a joint powers agreement (Policy reference: AR-8d, 8e, 2d).

### **Agricultural Resources Program 5: Farmworker Housing**

**Program Description:** Establish a program, working with the Sonoma County Community Development Commission to provide seasonal farm workers with mobile housing which could be located on any specific parcel during harvest (Policy reference: AR-7d).

### **Agricultural Resources Program 6: Design Guidelines Promoting Rural Character for Agricultural Support Uses.**

**Program Description:** Review current County Code and Design Guidelines applicable to agricultural support uses in rural areas and consider revising to reduce or minimize County imposed urban style improvements (Policy reference: AR-9h).

### **Agricultural Resources Program 7: Sonoma Valley Event Coordination**

**Program Description:** The County would initiate a pilot event coordination program in the Sonoma Valley Planning Area to monitor and track special events on agricultural lands and agriculture-related events on other lands to reduce cumulative impacts (Policy reference: AR-6d).

### **Agricultural Resources Program 8: Farm Homestays**

**Program Description:** Revise the Zoning and other Codes to allow farm homestays in agricultural areas (Policy reference: AR-6h).