

Agricultural Land Use Issues

Agriculture has long been an important land use in Lake County. Native Americans harvested acorns from oak trees as a staple food, and early European settlers relied on livestock and a variety of grains, fruits, and vegetables for subsistence. Cattle drives from Lake County were the first commercial agriculture, and were soon followed by wheat, wine grape, pear, walnut, hop, and "Blue Lake" green bean production. All but wheat, hops and green beans are still major agricultural commodities in Lake County today.

The Lake County general plan recognizes the continuing importance of agriculture in Lake County, stating that, "The agricultural resources of the County shall be protected and efforts to preserve their continued productivity shall be promoted."

Agricultural Land in Lake County*

Land use	Area (acres)
Crop land	28,862
Rangeland & pastures	247,338
Total county land area	850,984

*1997 Lake County Farmland Survey, California Department of Conservation.

Agriculture contributes to Lake County in several ways:

- **Economics-** Gross production value of crops and livestock is approximately \$50 million annually, with additional multiplier effects in the county economy.
- **Aesthetics-** Agriculture provides open space and contributes to the rural character of Lake County.
- **Natural Resources-** While food demand increases, prime agricultural lands are disappearing in California and worldwide. Lake County has areas with excellent soils and a climate suited to production of a wide variety of crops.

While agriculture is still a major land use and contributor to Lake County's economy, an increasing proportion of the resident population is not involved in agriculture. Because of different economic and lifestyle goals, conflicts may occur between farmers and their residential and commercial neighbors. For example, neighbors may object to noise, dust, or chemical sprays coming from nearby agricultural operations. In turn, farmers may find that the need to adjust their operations to residential concerns causes economic hardship.

The most effective way to minimize potential conflicts is to keep intensive agriculture and residential areas as separate as possible.

County Land Use Policy

Lake County residents recognize that agricultural, residential, and commercial land uses are interdependent, and continued quality growth is necessary for a healthy local economy. The goal of local land use policy is to foster balanced land use.



The county general plan outlines land use objectives and designates land use zones. The zoning ordinance describes specific regulations for each land use zone. Ways in which the plan and accompanying regulations protect agricultural lands and reduce farmer/neighbor conflicts include:

- defining separate areas for agricultural, residential, commercial, and other land uses.
- where possible, using transitional zones, for example a rural residential zone, between residential and agricultural zones.

- setting minimum parcel sizes. For example, in order to maintain viable farming units, parcels cannot be divided smaller than 40 acres in the agricultural zones.
- directing non-agricultural development onto marginal agricultural lands.
- designating permitted uses in each zone. For example, nonagricultural commercial uses are not permitted in the agricultural zones.

Limitations of the county general plan and zoning ordinance in reducing farmer-neighbor conflicts and protecting agricultural land are also evident:

- Agricultural districts border directly on residential districts in some areas.
- Within agricultural zones there are many parcels of 2 to 20 acres which were created before passage of the 40-acre minimum requirement. When these are sold to non-agricultural users, the agriculture-residential interface increases.
- The county general plan can be amended on a case by case basis.

The Williamson Act is a state program used by Lake County. Farm-land owners and the county enter into voluntary, 10 year contracts that restrict development on the land in return for reduced property taxes. In 1997, 50,011 acres were in the Williamson Act in Lake County.

A right to farm ordinance has been adopted in Lake County. This requires those who purchase land near farms to be informed of potential consequences of living in an agricultural area. Both realtors and the county Planning Division have disclosure forms that are signed by potential home buyers or persons applying for building permits.



Buffers to mitigate pesticide use impacts can be recommended by the county Agricultural Commissioner during the review of proposed developments. For example, a recommended buffer could be a vegetation screen and a 300-foot setback between new residences and agricultural operations.

Additional Policy Tools



Conservation easements can be created by landowners to restrict development of their land, while maintaining full agricultural operations. Easements can last for a specific period or in perpetuity. Usually, private, non-profit organizations purchase the easements, and some state and federal money is available for this purpose. The Lake County Land Trust has recently been established to preserve wildlife habitat and open space, including agricultural lands. Strategically placed easements can serve as permanent buffers to separate agricultural and urban areas.

City land use plans also recognize the importance of maintaining agriculture in Lake County. For example, the City of Lakeport General Plan discourages the annexation of prime agricultural land and seeks to reduce conflict between agricultural and urban land uses.

Other policy tools to protect farmland are described in the Lake County Factbook (see references).

Additional Resources Agencies and Organizations

Lake County Community
Development Dept.,
Planning Division
255 N. Forbes Street
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 263-2221

Lake County Dept.
of Agriculture
883 Lakeport Blvd
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 263-0217

Lake County Farm Bureau
65 Soda Bay Road
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 263-0911

Lake County Land Trust
P.O. Box 158
Lower Lake, CA 95457
(707) 994-2024

Clearlake Chamber of
Commerce
4700 Golf Avenue
Clear Lake, CA 95422
(707) 994-3600

Lake County
Marketing Program
875 Lakeport Blvd.
Lakeport, CA 95453
(800)-525-3743
www.lake county.com

Greater Lakeport
Chamber of Commerce
290 S. Main Street
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 263-5092

University of California
Cooperative Extension
883 Lakeport Blvd.
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 263-6838

References

*County of Lake Comprehensive General Plan,
and Zoning Ordinance*, Lake County Community
Development Department

Lake County Factbook, U. C. Cooperative
Extension

Compiled and written by Erica Lundquist, Intern, and Rachel
Elkins, Farm Advisor, University of California Cooperative
Extension, Lakeport, California, through a grant from the
California Communities Program, University of California,
Davis, 1998.

Additional funding provided by: Bank of Lake County,
California Women for Agriculture, Lake County Chapter,
Clear Lake Grange #680, Lake Community Bank, Lake County
Farm Bureau, Lake County Marketing Program, UC Cooperative
Extension, Lake County, and West Lake Resource Conservation
District.

Agriculture in Lake County, California

Land Use Issues



Produced by the Lake County Farmers
and Neighbors Planning Committee,
dedicated to ensuring continuation of
agriculture as part of Lake County's
economic and cultural future.