

4.2 AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

This section evaluates the potential effects of implementing the 2040 General Plan on agriculture and forestry resources, including Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance (defined as “Farmland” or “Important Farmland” in CEQA, pursuant to guidance in CEQA Section 21095 and State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, and the County), as well as the potential to convert Important Farmland to nonagricultural use or forestland to nonforest use, result in indirect loss of agriculture due to land use conflicts, and conflict with zoning for agricultural use, a Williamson Act contract, or zoning for forestland or timberland. As described in the “Approach to the Environmental Analysis” section, above, the following assessment of impacts is based on the characterization of existing environmental conditions and regulatory setting provided in the January 2020 Background Report (Appendix B). Where necessary, each section identifies changes (e.g., new information, regulatory changes) to the environmental and regulatory setting included in the Background Report that are relevant to understanding the 2040 General Plan’s potential impacts.

Comments on the notice of preparation included requests for discussion of the type, amount, and location of direct and indirect farmland conversion, indirect impacts to agricultural operations such as land use conflicts, cumulative impacts on agricultural land, potential contract resolutions for land in an agricultural preserve or enrolled in a Williamson Act contract, and use of agricultural conservation easements as a mitigation measure. Other comments expressed concerns regarding carbon dioxide (greenhouse gas) emissions from agriculture, pollution and health risks attributed to agricultural operations, and potential land use conflicts that may result from implementation of the 2040 General Plan. Comments also included a desire for organic or regenerative agriculture and carbon farming to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. These comments are addressed in this section, as appropriate. The NOP and comments on the NOP are included in Appendix A. The analysis in this section focuses on adverse impacts on agricultural and forestry resources and conflicts with agricultural land uses as a result of 2040 General Plan implementation; impacts on air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and water quality are addressed, respectively, in Section 4.3, “Air Quality,” Section 4.8, “Greenhouse Gas Emissions,” and Section 4.10, “Hydrology and Water Quality.” Cumulative impacts are analyzed in Chapter 5.0, “Cumulative Impacts.”

4.2.1 Background Report Setting Updates

REGULATORY SETTING

Agriculture and forestry are described in the Background Report (Appendix B), Chapter 3, “Land Use,” (Section 3.3, “Annexation and Development Trends,” which provides a discussion of growth management ordinances, greenbelt agreements, SOAR voter initiatives); Chapter 9, “Agriculture,” (see Section 9.1, “Agricultural Resources,” Section 9.2, “Agricultural Production,” Section 9.3, “Agricultural Policies and Programs,” and Appendix 9.A, “Important Farmland Mapping Conversation Rate Tables”); and Section 12.2, “Climate Change Effects,” in Chapter 12, “Climate Change.” In addition to the information provided in these sections of the Background Report (Appendix B), the following information is relevant to understanding the potential impacts of the 2040 General Plan on agriculture and forestry resources.

State

California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act Contract)

The State adopted the California Land Conservation Act in 1965, set forth at Government Code section 51200 et seq. (LCA, also known as the Williamson Act), to provide tax incentives to encourage the protection of agricultural and open space land. In 1969, the County adopted, and has subsequently revised, its “Guidelines for Implementation of the Land Conservation Act of 1965/the Williamson Act” (LCA Guidelines). All land with an Agricultural land use designation in the General Plan is considered an Agricultural Preserve and is eligible for an LCA contract. There are three types of LCA contracts in the County of Ventura: Crop Production (10 or 20 year terms), Animal Husbandry/Grazing (10 or 20 year terms) and Open Space/Wildlife Habitat Contract (20 year term). These contracts intend to preserve agricultural or open space land and discourage its premature conversion to other uses. Among other things, the LCA Guidelines establish eligibility criteria for these contracts. In exchange for the preservation of agricultural or open space land, participating property owners receive a reduction of property taxes that is limited to the agricultural or open space value of the property.

California Timberland Productivity Act of 1982

The Timberland Productivity Act of 1982 requires all counties and cities in California with productive private timberland to establish Timberland Production Zones (TPZs) for the purpose of discouraging the premature conversion of timberland to other uses (Government Code Section 51100 et seq.). The general plan must reflect the distribution of existing TPZ zoning and have a land use category that provides for timber production. TPZ zoning can also be used to implement the Conservation Element by husbanding timber resources. Patterned after the Williamson Act, TPZs are rolling 10-year contracts providing preferential tax assessments to qualified timberlands. Under this program, assessments on timber are based on the value of the timber at the time of harvest rather than an annual assessment on the market value of standing timber. Assessment of zoned timberland is based on a statutory value of land that is related to site capability and is annually indexed to changes in the periodic immediate harvest value.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Agriculture and forestry are described in the Background Report (Appendix B) in Chapter 3, “Land Use,” (Section 3.3, “Annexation and Development Trends,” provides a discussion of growth management ordinances, greenbelt agreements, SOAR voter initiatives); Chapter 9, “Agriculture,” (see Section 9.1, “Agricultural Resources,” Section 9.2, “Agricultural Production,” Section 9.3, “Agricultural Policies and Programs,” and Appendix 9.A, “Important Farmland Mapping Conversation Rate Tables”); and Section 12.2, “Climate Change Effects,” in Chapter 12, “Climate Change.” In addition to the information provided in the Background Report, the following information is relevant to understanding the potential impacts of the 2040 General Plan on agriculture and forestry resources:

- ▶ Timberland. The plan area does not contain land which produces timber commercially for eventual use as lumber or pulp; however, six parcels either currently or formerly used for Christmas tree farming are zoned Timberland Preserve (T-P) pursuant to the provisions of the Timberland Preserve Zone of the County Zoning Ordinance. The T-P zone is compatible with the Open Space, Agriculture and Rural land use designations (of the Land

Use Chapter). “Timber” refers to trees of any species maintained for eventual harvest for forest products purposes, whether planted or of natural growth, standing or down, on privately or publicly owned land, including Christmas trees, but does not include nursery stock. All six parcels are located in the Ojai Valley area. Together they make up approximately 55 acres and are identified by the following Assessor's Parcel Numbers: 030-0-230-17, 024-0-080-15 and 16, 032-0-160-07, 035-0-090-12, and 018-0-170-38. All properties are privately owned (Ventura County 2019).

4.2.2 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

METHODOLOGY

To determine whether implementation of the 2040 General Plan would result in adverse impacts on agricultural and forest resources, the proposed land use diagram was compared to the location of existing agricultural and forestry resources, including Important Farmland Inventory Maps, Land Conservation Act Contract maps, and the County's aerial imagery. The analysis considers whether future development under the 2040 General Plan could result in loss of agricultural resources or conversion of agricultural resources to non-agricultural uses by allowing for non-agricultural land uses to be located directly on existing designated farmland. It also considers whether the 2040 General Plan would result in indirect loss of agricultural resources by allowing for non-agricultural land uses adjacent to classified farmland. Examples of indirect losses of agricultural resources due to land use conflicts include: decreased solar access due to building heights from nonagricultural uses, dust exposure from construction or ongoing operations, and a reduction in available water resources for irrigation. Indirect loss of agricultural soils is due to increased wind and water erosion and direct loss of important soils is attributed to removal or permanent overcovering. The analysis also evaluates the potential for conflicts between the 2040 General Plan land use designations and properties with existing zoning for agricultural use, Williamson Act contracts, and zoning for forestland, timberland, and timberland zoned Timberland Production. Loss of forestland or conversion of forestland to non-forest use is also evaluated in this section.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

As discussed in the “Approach to the Environmental Analysis” section, the thresholds used to determine the significance of the 2040 General Plan's impacts are based on the County of Ventura's adopted Initial Study Assessment Guidelines (ISAG), which include threshold criteria to assist in the evaluation of significant impacts for individual projects. Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines also provides considerations for determining the significance of a project's impacts, in the form of initial study checklist questions.

To develop thresholds of significance, the County has deviated from the ISAG threshold criteria, where appropriate, to consider the programmatic nature of a general plan for the entire unincorporated area and to incorporate the 2019 revisions to the Appendix G checklist.

Specifically, ISAG threshold 5a regarding loss of agricultural soils was supplemented to include reference to the Important Farmland Inventory Classifications (Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance) for consistency with the classifications used in Appendix G question II(a).

Appendix G questions II(b) through II(e) were added to address topics not included in ISAG including conflicts with zoning for agricultural use or Williamson contracts, conflicts with zoning for forest and timberland resources, loss or conversion of forestlands to non-forest use, and other changes in the existing environment that could result in the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use or forestland to nonforest use.

For the purpose of this draft EIR, implementation of the 2040 General Plan would have a significant impact on agricultural and forestry resources if it would:

- ▶ Result in the direct and/or indirect loss Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance (defined as “Farmland” or “Important Farmland” in CEQA, pursuant to guidance in CEQA Section 21095 and State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G). Any project that would result in the direct and/or indirect loss of agricultural soils meeting or exceeding the following criteria would be considered as having a significant impact:

General Plan Land Use Designation	Important Farmland Inventory Classification	Acres Lost
Agricultural	Prime/ Statewide	5
	Unique	10
	Local	15
Open Space/Rural	Prime/ Statewide	10
	Unique	15
	Local	20
All Land Use Designations	Prime/ Statewide	20
	Unique	30
	Local	40

- ▶ Result in classified farmland nearby any nonagricultural land use or project that is closer than the distances set forth below, unless a justification exists for a waiver or a deviation from these distances, such that incompatibilities with adjacent land uses would not be created, based on the unique characteristics of the subject project:

Evaluation for All Nonagricultural Operations Projects	
	Distance from Nonagricultural Structures or Use and Common Boundary Line Adjacent to Classified Farmland
Without Vegetative Screening	300 feet
With Vegetative Screening	150 feet
New K-12 School	1,320 feet

- ▶ Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.
- ▶ Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forestland (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]).

- ▶ Result in the loss of forestland or conversion of forestland to nonforest use.
- ▶ Involve other changes in the existing environment that, because of their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to nonagricultural use or conversion of forestland to nonforest use.

ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER

As described above, this section includes an analysis of the potential for future development under the 2040 General Plan to result in adverse impacts to existing agricultural and forestry resources in the county, including analysis of potential conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use or forestland to nonforest use. The impact analysis provided in this section addresses the physical changes to the existing environment that could occur as a result of 2040 General Plan implementation. The 2040 General Plan would not result in any other changes that due to their location or nature would result in the conversion of Farmland to nonagricultural use or forestland to nonforest use. Therefore, this issue is not discussed further in this section.

ISAG Section 5a. uses the terminology “agricultural soils” when referring to lands designated under one of the Important Farmland Inventory Classifications (i.e., Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance). For consistency the remainder of this section uses the Important Farmland Inventory Classifications when referring to “agricultural soils” The terminology “agricultural soils” is not discussed further in this section.

Existing use and regulation of pesticides is an important issue in the county, and is addressed by the County in several ways. The Pesticide Use Enforcement (PUE) Program is a countywide program managed by the County Agricultural Commissioner (CAC) that benefits the public, the agricultural industry and the environment by permitting the legal and safe use of necessary pest control products and taking action against people who use these products illegally or unsafely. The CAC has jurisdiction over all uses of pesticides including home and garden uses, agricultural uses, industrial and institutional uses, and use for structural pest control. The PUE program is focused on the agricultural use of pesticides, and the use of Restricted Materials by all people and is closely monitored by the CAC. Staff from the CAC monitors the application of pesticides and issues fines of up to \$5,000 for any violations of applicable laws and regulations. Physicians are required by law to report any suspected exposure to a pesticide to the County Health Officer. All reported incidents are investigated by CAC staff to determine if any applicable laws or regulations were violated when the pesticide was used, and to assess if the illness was related to a pesticide exposure. The CAC also conducts inspections to see if required records are kept, if training has been provided to pesticide handlers and agricultural workers, and if required waiting periods have been observed before workers reenter treated fields or before crops are harvested. The CAC also collects data on pesticide use, which collected and sent to the California Department of Pesticide Regulation where data from all over the State is compiled annually. Permits for all restricted materials, or products deemed by the State to pose the most risk to handlers, fieldworkers, the public or the environment are issued by the Agricultural Commissioner. Specific conditions are issued by the CAC for the use of restricted materials, such as a site inspection and a 24-hour notification prior to application, to mitigate any hazards associated with application of restricted materials. The PUE program is primarily funded by the “mill tax,” a

tax on all pesticides sold in California which provides funding for both county and State programs that regulate pesticides.

The CAC's Office regularly engages in public outreach to school districts, concerned parties and underserved communities. Meetings are frequently held with groups such as the Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE), Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP), Lideras Campesinas, Ventura County Coalition Advocating for Pesticide Safety (VC-CAPS), Rincon Vitova, Insectary and others to address concerns and discuss viable alternatives to the most toxic pesticides. Title 3, Section 6692 of the California Code of Regulations, effective January 1, 2018, contains regulations that control the use of pesticides nearby schools and day-care centers. Under this rule pesticides, herbicides, and fumigants are prohibited within a quarter mile of public kindergarten through twelfth grade schools and licensed day care centers between the hours of 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. These rules allow applications of fumigants within 0.25 mile of school or day-care campuses if they are not in session and will not be in session for at least 36 hours after the application. Schools and day-care centers must be given at least a 24-hour notice before application (CDPR 2018, English n.d.). In the years 2018 through 2019 the Ventura County Grand Jury concluded that the County government effectively implemented regulations and effectively reduced the exposure of students and faculty in campuses adjacent to agricultural use of pesticides, herbicides, and fumigants (Ventura County Grand Jury 2019). Existing pesticide use and regulation is not discussed further in this section.

2040 GENERAL PLAN POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

Policies and implementation programs in the 2040 General Plan related to agriculture and forestry resources and, specifically, the thresholds of significance identified above, include the following:

Agriculture Element

- ▶ **Policy AG-1.1: Agricultural Land Protection and Preservation.** The County shall continue to protect and preserve agricultural land by directing growth away from productive agricultural lands into cities, unincorporated urban areas, or existing communities and by supporting the acquisition or voluntary dedication of agriculture conservation easements. (RDR, MPSP) *[Source: New Policy]*
- ▶ **Policy AG-1.2: Agricultural Land Use Designation.** The County shall ensure that discretionary development located on land designated as Agricultural on the General Plan Land Use Diagram and identified as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance on the State's Important Farmland Inventory is planned and designed to remove as little land as possible from potential agricultural production and to minimize impacts on topsoil. (RDR, MPSP) *[Source: Existing GPP Policy 1.6.2.1, modified, SOAR]*
- ▶ **Policy AG-1.3: Greenbelt Agreements.** The County shall preserve agricultural land by retaining and expanding existing Greenbelt Agreements and encouraging the formation of additional Greenbelt Agreements. (MPSP, IGC) *[Source: Existing GPP Policy 1.6.2.5, SOAR]*

- ▶ **Policy AG-1.4: Land Conservation Act Contracts.** The County shall encourage Land Conservation Act (LCA) contracts on irrigated farmlands and Open Space lands. (MPSP, IGC, PI) *[Source: Existing GPP Policy 1.6.2.3, SOAR]*
- ▶ **Policy AG-2.1: Discretionary Development Adjacent to Agriculturally Designated Lands.** The County shall ensure that discretionary development adjacent to Agriculturally designated lands does not conflict with agricultural use of those lands. (RDR) *[Source: Existing GPP Policy 1.6.2.6, SOAR]*
- ▶ **Policy AG-2.2: Impacts from Transportation Capital Improvements.** The County shall plan transportation and other County capital improvements so as to avoid or mitigate impacts to Important Farmland to the extent feasible. (SO) *[Source: Existing GPP Policy 1.6.2.4, modified, SOAR]*
- ▶ **Policy AG-2.3: Right-to-Farm Ordinance.** The County's Right-to-Farm Ordinance shall be maintained and updated as needed to protect agricultural land uses from conflicts with non-agricultural uses, as well as to help land purchasers and residents understand the potential for nuisance, (e.g., dust, noise, odors) that may occur as the natural result of living in or near agricultural areas. (RDR) *[Source: New Policy]*

Implementation Programs

- ▶ **Implementation Program B: Right-to-Farm Ordinance.** The County shall periodically review and update the Right-to-Farm Ordinance when necessary to raise public awareness (including within the local real estate industry) of the Right-to-Farm provisions. *[Source: New Program]*

Land Use Element

- ▶ **Policy LU-7.1: Areas Appropriate for the Rural Land Use Designation.** The County shall require that lands designated as Rural are those located outside areas designated Urban or Existing Community which are deemed suitable and appropriate for low-density rural residential or recreational development. (RDR) *[Source: Existing GPP Policy 3.2.2.3, SOAR]*
- ▶ **Policy LU-7.2: Minimal Parcel Size for the Rural Land Use Designation.** The County shall require that the smallest minimum parcel size consistent with the Rural land use designation is two acres. The County may require larger minimum parcel sizes based on the parcel's Non-Costal Zoning Ordinance zoning classification. (RDR) *[Source: Existing GPP Policy 3.2.2.3, SOAR, modified]*
- ▶ **Policy LU-7.3: Maximum Lot Coverage Nonconforming Lots - Rural Land Use Designation.** The County shall require that the maximum lot coverage for lots of less than one acre (nonconforming) in area shall be as specified for the Rural designation, or 2,500 square feet plus 1 square foot for each 4,596 square feet of lot area over 5,000 square feet, whichever is greater. (RDR) *[Source: Existing GPP Figures 3.7a through 3.28b, Existing Community Building Intensity/Population Density Tables, Footnote No. 1]*
- ▶ **Policy LU-8.1: Areas Appropriate for the Agricultural Land Use Designation.** The County shall ensure that the Agricultural land use designation primarily includes lands that are designated as Prime Farmlands, Farmlands of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmlands in the State's Important Farmland Inventory (IFI), although the County may not

designate land as Agricultural if small areas of agricultural land are isolated from larger blocks of farming land. In such cases, the Agricultural land is to be assigned to the Open Space or Rural designation for consistency with surrounding properties. (MPSP) [Source: Existing GPP Policy 3.2.2.4-1, SOAR]

- ▶ **Policy LU-8.2: Land Uses Appropriate for the Agricultural Land Use Designation.** The County shall ensure that land designated as Agricultural is used for the production of food, fiber, and ornamentals; animal husbandry and care; uses accessory to agriculture; and limited temporary or public uses which are consistent with agricultural or agriculturally related uses. (RDR) [Source: Existing GPP Policy 3.2.2.4-3, SOAR]
- ▶ **Policy LU-8.3: Minimal Parcel Size for the Agricultural Land Use Designation.** The County shall ensure that the smallest minimum parcel size consistent with the Agricultural land use designation is 40 acres. The County may require larger minimum parcel sizes based on the zone classification. (RDR, MPSP) [Source: Existing GPP Policy 3.2.2.4-2, SOAR]
- ▶ **Policy LU-8.4: Maximum Lot Coverage Nonconforming Lots - Agricultural Land Use Designation.** The County shall ensure that the maximum lot coverage of lots of less than 10 acres (nonconforming) in area shall be as specified for the Agricultural designation, or 2,500 square feet plus 1 square foot for each 22,334 square feet of lot area over 5,000 square feet, whichever is greater. Greater lot coverage may be allowed under discretionary permits for Farmworker Housing Complexes and existing uses/structures listed in the Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance under the heading of “Crop and Orchard Production”. (RDR) [Source: Existing GPP Figure 3.4 General Residential Building Intensity Standards/Population Density Range Table, Footnote No. 5, modified]

El Rio/Del Norte Area Plan

- ▶ **Policy ED-2.1: Agricultural Use on Agricultural Land.** The County shall require discretionary development located on land designated as Agricultural to not conflict with the agricultural uses of those lands. [Source: Existing El Rio/Del Norte Policy 3.2.2.2]
- ▶ **Policy ED-2.3: Minimize Impacts on Agricultural Uses.** The County shall condition discretionary development located adjacent to Agricultural designated land to minimize the impacts on the agricultural uses. [Source: Existing El Rio/Del Norte Policy 3.2.2.3]
- ▶ **Policy ED-2.4: Buffers for Agricultural Land.** The County shall require discretionary, non-agricultural land uses adjacent to Agricultural designated land shall be required to establish appropriate buffers as determined by the Agricultural Department. [Source: Existing El Rio/Del Norte Policy 3.2.2.4]
- ▶ **Policy ED-13.2: Buffers for Industrial Uses.** The County shall require new or expanding industrial uses adjacent to residential, commercial, open space and agricultural areas to provide buffers to protect these uses from nuisances and visual, audio and any air-borne intrusion, as well as minimizing truck traffic through residential areas. [Source: Existing El Rio/Del Norte Policy 3.8.2.3]

Ojai Valley Area Plan

- ▶ **Policy OJ-15.3: Assurance of Agricultural Operations in Open Space.** The County shall prohibit all discretionary development that would have a significant unavoidable

impact on agricultural operations in Open Space designated lands unless a statement of overriding considerations is adopted by the decision-making body. *[Source: Existing Ojai Valley Policy 3.2.2.3]*

- ▶ **Policy OJ-61-1: Buffers for Agricultural Operations.** The County shall require discretionary, non-agricultural land uses adjacent to agricultural operations to establish appropriate buffers. *[Source: Existing Ojai Valley Policy 1.5.2.1]*

Piru Area Plan

- ▶ **Policy P-65.3: Buffer for Agricultural Designations.** The County shall condition discretionary development adjacent to Agricultural designated land to provide an agricultural buffer (which may include a setback, vegetative screen, roadway, and/or an agricultural easement). The County shall require such buffer be subject to review and approval by the Agricultural Commissioner. *[Source: Existing Piru Policy 1.8.2.3]*
- ▶ **Policy P-12.1: Agricultural and Open Space on the Land Use Diagram.** The County shall locate Agricultural and Open Space in conformance with the Land Use Diagram which the County developed in accordance with the above goals (Figures P-2 and P-4). *[Source: Existing Piru Policy 3.6.2.1]*
- ▶ **Policy P-12.2: Land Designated Open Space or Agricultural:** The County shall designate land outside the Piru Urban and Existing Community areas as Open Space or Agricultural. *[Source: Existing Piru Policy 3.6.2.2]*
- ▶ **Policy P-66.2: Impacts on Agriculture.** The County shall review all discretionary development to minimize impacts on agriculture. *[Source: Existing Piru Policy 3.6.2.3]*

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact 4.2-1: Loss of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance

Approximately 65 percent of soil types within the county are suitable for agriculture production, which includes rangeland for grazing (Appendix B). These soil types are capable of producing varying amounts and types of agricultural commodities. Gentle slopes are typically more fertile and allow for water to easily percolate into the ground and are therefore more capable of producing larger crop variations. The most fertile soil association is Pico-Metz-Anacapa. This association accounts for seven percent of the soils in the county and is generally located in temperate climates near the coast, with an average soil depth of 60 inches or more. The Pico-Metz-Anacapa Association has a shallow slope no greater than nine percent. Similar to Pico-Metz-Anacapa, the Mocho-Sorrento-Garretson Association yields a majority of agricultural products, spanning 14 percent of the county. Mocho-Sorrento-Garretson Association is a well-drained soil, with 60 inches or more in soil depth (Appendix B).

As of 2016, the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program had inventoried over 555,000 acres of land in the county, classifying over 18,000 acres of land as Important Farmland. Overall, a total of 39 percent of the land within the county is designated as Important Farmland. According to Section 9 of the Background Report, the average farm size in the county was 131 acres as of 2012 (Appendix B). However, the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program inventory

does not consider farmlands less than 10 acres, which could also be affected by future development under the 2040 General Plan. The County of Ventura contains prime agricultural lands which are highly productive due to the combination of soils, climate, and water availability; are suitable to a variety of orchard, row, and horticultural crops; and are capable of supporting commercially viable agricultural operations on minimum 9-acre parcels. According to the most recent data from the USDA (2017), the majority of farms in the county are less than 50 acres and approximately half of the farms are less than 10 acres.

Because of the programmatic nature of the 2040 General Plan, a precise quantification of the total loss of Important Farmland and farms smaller than 10 acres from future development under the 2040 General Plan cannot be known at this time. This analysis focuses on the potential indirect and direct loss of Important Farmland farms that are smaller than 10 acres that could occur based on the proposed land use diagram and the policies and implementation programs of the 2040 General Plan.

The land use diagram of the 2040 General Plan would accommodate future development of relatively higher intensity residential, commercial, mixed use, and industrial land uses within the Existing Community area designation (boundary) and the Urban area designation (boundary). These are areas with existing residential, commercial, and/or industrial uses developed with urban building intensities generally located adjacent to the boundaries of incorporated cities or along highway corridors such as State Route (SR) 33, SR 118, SR 126, and Highway 101. The residential, commercial, mixed use, and industrial land use designations of the 2040 General Plan would apply to approximately 1.2 percent of land in the unincorporated county. Potential uses within these designations include small- and large-lot detached single-family homes, one- to three-story attached single-family dwellings and lower density multifamily developments, mixes of commercial, office, residential, civic, and/or recreational uses, one- to two-story structures for retail and commercial services, and industrial employment-generating uses, such as production, assembly, warehousing, and distribution.

The Rural land use designation would allow for low-density and low-intensity land uses such as residential estates and other rural uses which are maintained in conjunction with agricultural and horticultural uses or in conjunction with the keeping of farm animals for recreational purposes, such as greenhouses, principal and accessory structures related to agriculture, and also oil and gas wells, and would apply to approximately 0.9 percent of land in the unincorporated county.

Approximately 97.1 percent of the unincorporated county would remain designated as either Open Space (approximately 88 percent) or Agriculture (approximately 9 percent) under the 2040 General Plan. The Open Space land use designation would allow low intensity development with a minimum parcel size of 10 acres and 1 dwelling unit per parcel. Other uses could include composting operations, greenhouses, correctional institutions, fire stations, and oil and gas wells. The Agriculture land use designation would allow for development of one dwelling unit per parcel and a minimum parcel size of 40 acres. Other uses could include greenhouses, principal and accessory structures related to agriculture, and composting operations. Proposed policies of the 2040 General Plan addressing flaring and trucking associated with new discretionary oil and gas wells could result in the construction and operation of new pipelines for the conveyance of oil, gas, or produced water. The Agricultural and Open Space land use designations limit building lot coverage to 5 percent, and the Rural land use designation to 25 percent, of the total legal lot. Focusing future development within the Existing Community area designation (boundary) and the Urban area designation

(boundary) would reduce the potential for direct and indirect loss of Important Farmland and farms smaller than 10 acres. In addition, the 2040 General Plan would apply Rural, Agricultural, or Open Space land use designations to most existing Important Farmland in the county, which would minimize but not completely avoid potential direct loss of Important Farmland. Additionally, the 2040 General Plan would not make land use designation changes to existing land uses designated as Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural.

While overall the 2040 General Plan land use diagram protects agricultural land from higher intensity urban development, the land use designations of the 2040 General Plan could allow for limited instances in which individual future developments result in the direct or indirect loss of Important Farmland (including Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance) that would exceed the County's established acreage limitation criteria for loss of farmland and result in the permanent loss of this valuable resource.

The County, through the ISAG, determines the significance of loss of Important Farmland based on general plan land use designation, important farmland inventory classification, and acres lost. For example, conversion of 5 or more acres of farmland of Prime or Statewide Importance with an Agriculture land use designation is considered significant under ISAG, whereas 40 acres with land use designations other than Agriculture or Open Space and designated as farmland of Local Importance must be converted before being considered a significant impact.

The ISAG defines an indirect loss of soils as a loss caused by increased wind or water erosion. Future development under the 2040 General Plan has the potential to result in indirect loss of soils. Increased residential, commercial, and/or industrial development in urban and nonurban areas that replaces pervious surfaces with impervious surfaces can impact percolation and infiltration of water and stormwater and cause elevated levels of runoff. Higher runoff rates increase the probability of water erosion and subsequently the indirect loss of important soils. Root systems increase water infiltration and physically bind or restrain soil particles preventing both water and wind erosion. A reduction in vegetative cover attributed to development or changes in farming practices, such as the loss of an agricultural tree row, increases the likelihood of water and wind erosion events. Indirect soil losses that would exceed the County's established acreage limitation criteria for would be considered a significant impact for this valuable resource.

The County has existing mechanisms in place to support the preservation of agriculture, which include the Guidelines for Orderly Development, the LCA program, greenbelt agreements, the Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR) initiative, the County's Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy, and the Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance (NCZO). Approximately 164,000 acres of agricultural lands and open space in the county are covered by greenbelt agreements between the County and incorporated cities. Through these voluntary agreements cities express their commitment to not annex land within a greenbelt while the County expresses its commitment to restrict development to uses consistent with existing agricultural or open space zoning. In addition, changes to Rural, Agricultural, and Open Space land use designations and substantive changes to related Rural, Agricultural, and Open Space goals and policies cannot occur without countywide voter approval under the SOAR voter initiative. The SOAR initiative protects existing agricultural lands including Important Farmlands and farms smaller than 10 acres and limits land use conflicts that may result in direct or indirect loss of farmlands.

The Ventura County Guidelines for Orderly Development maintain the consistent theme that urban development should be located within incorporated cities as much feasibly possible. The guidelines encourage urban development to occur within Cities; enhance the regional responsibility of County government; and facilitate the orderly planning and development of Ventura County by allowing for urbanization in a manner that will accommodate the development goals of the individual communities while conserving the resources, which includes agricultural resources, of Ventura County (Ventura County 2018). LCA contracts intend to preserve agricultural land and discourage its premature conversion to non-agricultural uses. In exchange for the preservation of agricultural land, participating property owners receive a reduction of property taxes that are limited to the agricultural value of the property.

In addition, the County's Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy substantially lessens the potential for indirect loss of Important Farmland by requiring buffers or screening between specified agricultural and non-agricultural land uses to prevent or minimize conflicts that may arise at the interface of agricultural lands and urban structures or ongoing non-farming activities. It applies where urban structures or ongoing non-farming activities are permitted adjacent to land: (1) in crop or orchard production; or (2) classified by the California Department of Conservation Important Farmland Inventory as Prime, Statewide Importance, Unique or Local Importance farmland. This policy applies to projects requiring discretionary approval by the County or a city where the proposed non-farming activity abuts or is located on land zoned Agriculture Exclusive, Open Space, or Rural Agriculture, where the farming activity is located outside a Sphere of Influence, as adopted by LAFCo (County of Ventura 2006).

The Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy provides guidelines to prevent or minimize the conflicts that may arise at the agricultural/urban interface in the form of buffers/setbacks on the non-agricultural property. The policy protects the public health, safety, and welfare of residents while also protecting the economic viability and long-term sustainability of the agricultural industry. With respect to new urban development and non-agricultural uses the policy establishes requirements for fencing, minimum standards for a vegetative screen, acceptable uses within 300 feet of agriculture, and acceptable uses within 150 feet of agriculture where a vegetative screen is provided. With respect to modifications of existing uses and activities, the policy sets forth guidelines and requirements for situations where existing structures do not allow a 300- or 150-foot setback and where a school is located directly within 300 feet of agriculture.

Pursuant to Section 8178-5 of the Ventura County Coastal Zoning Ordinance development on agricultural lands is required to meet the following development standards to maintain agricultural viability: a.) the establishment or maintenance of the use or development will not significantly reduce, restrict or adversely affect agricultural resources or the economic viability of commercial agricultural operations on-site or in the area, b.) all structures will be sited to minimize conflicts with agricultural operations, and c.) the minimum amount of agricultural land shall be removed from production. Likewise, the Ventura County NCZO contains regulations to protect agricultural resources. Specifically, Section 8109-0.4 requires that permitted projects that consist of nonagricultural uses adjacent to agricultural land should be located, designed, and operated to minimize adverse effects on agriculture, as well as conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses through the use of specific measures, including but not limited to use restrictions, buffer zones, fences and walls, and/or screening, which may be required in order to ensure that the above standard is met.

The 2040 General Plan also includes several policies and implementation programs that would further reduce potential impacts on Important Farmland. For example, Policies AG-1.1 and AG-1.2 protect agricultural land through the acquisition and dedication of agricultural easements and discretionary approval of projects that maintain and preserve Important Farmland. Policy AG-1.1 protects and preserves agricultural land by directing growth away from productive agricultural lands into cities, unincorporated urban areas, or existing communities and by supporting the acquisition or voluntary dedication of agriculture conservation easements. This policy focuses development in previously developed urban areas with a low likelihood of containing Important Farmland or farmland or farms that are less than 10 acres. Policy AG-1.2 ensures that discretionary development located on land designated as Agricultural on the General Plan Land Use Diagram and identified as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance on the State's Important Farmland Inventory is planned and designed to remove as little land as possible from potential agricultural production and to minimize impacts on topsoil. Implementation of this policy reduces the total amount of Important farmland and topsoil that is directly and indirectly lost as a result of development.

Policy AG-1.3 preserves agricultural land through the retention and expansion of existing greenbelt agreements and encouraging the formation of additional greenbelt agreements. Voluntary greenbelt agreements by cities express their commitment to not annex land within a greenbelt while the County expresses its commitment to restrict development to uses consistent with existing agricultural or open space zoning. Policy AG-1.4 encourages Land Conservation Act contracts on irrigated farmlands and open space lands, which minimizes conversions of agricultural land to non-agricultural land. Policy AG-2.2 encourages transportation and other county capital improvements to be planned in a manner to mitigate impacts on Important Farmland. Lastly, AG-2.3 maintains the Right-to-Farm Ordinance to protect agricultural land uses from conflicts with non-agricultural uses, as well as to help land purchasers and residents understand the potential for nuisance, (e.g., dust, noise, odors) that may occur as the natural result of living in or near agricultural areas.

The Ventura County Right-to-Farm Ordinance consists of two components. The first component is found in the enforcement sections of the Coastal and Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinances and is administered by the Planning Division's Zoning Enforcement Section (Sec. 8183-4.1 and Sec. 8114-2.1.1, respectively). These sections of the code protect farmers engaged in agricultural activity from public nuisance claims. The second component of the Right-to-Farm Ordinance consists of the following sections: Sec. 9121, Sec. 9131, and Sec. 9136. These sections require mandatory disclosure to neighboring property owners of the potential noise, odors, dust, and spraying that may result from farming and they detail procedures for mediation of disputes that may arise. The intent is to properly inform and to set realistic expectations for new residents and occupants of buildings located adjacent to farming operations. The second component of the "Right to Farm" Ordinance puts a new purchaser of property on notice that existing agricultural operations inherently have noise, odor and other potentially annoying activities that are associated with accepted agricultural operations. This protects the farming community, including Important Farmlands and farms less than 10 acres, from developments that would inhibit their ability to continue agricultural production.

Future development within the county would also be guided by Area Plans, which include additional policies designed to minimize the loss of Important Farmland. Of all the Area Plans, three include relevant policies, which are listed below.

The El Rio/Del Norte Area Plan includes the following policies that would reduce potential impacts on Agricultural lands.

- ▶ **Policy 3.2.2.2:** Discretionary development located on land designated as Agricultural shall not conflict with the agricultural uses of those lands.
- ▶ **Policy 3.2.2.3:** Discretionary development located adjacent to Agricultural designated land shall be conditioned to ensure that impacts on the agricultural uses are minimized.
- ▶ **Policy 3.2.2.4:** Discretionary, non-agricultural land uses adjacent to Agricultural designated land shall be required to establish appropriate buffers as determined by the Agricultural Department.
- ▶ **Policy 3.8.2.3:** New or expanding industrial uses adjacent to residential, commercial, open space and agricultural areas shall provide buffers to protect these uses from nuisances and visual, audio and any air-borne intrusion, as well as minimizing truck traffic through residential areas.

Like the Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy, Policies 3.2.2.2, 3.2.2.3, 3.2.2.4, and 3.8.2.3 lessen the potential for indirect loss of Important Farmland through specific requirements for discretionary development. Policy 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 ensure that discretionary development would occur in such a manner that minimizes incompatibilities with Agricultural land and thus the indirect loss of Important Farmland. Policies 3.2.2.4 and 3.8.2.3 would establish buffers between non-agricultural land uses to project adjacent to Agricultural designated land.

The Ojai Valley Area Plan includes the following policies that would reduce potential impacts on Agricultural lands.

- ▶ **Policy 1.5.2.1:** Discretionary, non-agricultural land uses adjacent to agricultural operations shall be required to establish appropriate buffers.
- ▶ **Policy 3.2.2.3:** All discretionary development that would have a significant unavoidable impact on agricultural operations in Open Space designated lands shall be prohibited unless a Statement of overriding considerations is adopted by the decision-making body.

Like the Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy, Policy 1.5.2.1 would substantially lessen the potential for indirect loss of Important Farmland by requiring buffers between specified agricultural and non-agricultural land uses to prevent or minimize conflicts that may arise at the interface of agricultural lands and urban structures or ongoing non-farming activities. Policy 3.2.2.3 prohibits discretionary development without appropriate approval by the decision making body. Discretionary development would be discouraged in land outside the Existing Community and Rural designated areas which contains land which is primarily in agricultural use and Important Farmlands.

The Piru Area Plan includes the following policies that would reduce potential impacts on Agricultural lands.

- ▶ **Policy 1.8.2.1:** Discretionary permits located on land designated as "Prime" or " Statewide Significance" by the State's Important Farmlands Inventory shall be planned and designed to remove as little land from agricultural production as possible and minimize impacts on topsoil.

- ▶ **Policy 1.8.2.3:** Discretionary development adjacent to Agricultural designated land shall be conditioned to provide an agricultural buffer (which may include a setback, vegetative screen, roadway, and/or an agricultural easement). Such buffer shall be subject to review and approval by the Agricultural Commissioner.
- ▶ **Policy 3.6.2.2:** Land outside the Piru Urban and Existing Community areas shall be designated as Open Space or Agricultural.
- ▶ **Policy 3.6.2.3:** All discretionary development shall be reviewed to ensure that impacts on agriculture are minimized.

Like the Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy, Policies 1.8.2.1, 1.8.2.3 and 3.6.2.3 lessen the potential for indirect loss of Important Farmland through specific requirements for discretionary development. Policy 1.8.2.1 prevents loss of Important Farmlands by requiring projects to be designed in a manner that avoids the loss of topsoil from Important Farmlands. Preservation of topsoil from Important Farmlands allows for later agricultural use and prevents permanent loss of a valuable resource. Policy 1.8.2.3 would substantially lessen potential indirect loss of Important Farmland by requiring buffers or screening between specified agricultural and non-agricultural land uses to prevent or minimize conflicts that may arise at the interface of agricultural lands and urban structures or ongoing non-farming activities. Policy 3.6.2.2 indicates that all land outside the Piru Urban and Existing Community areas shall be designated as Open Space or Agricultural. The majority of Important Farmland is located outside the Piru Urban and Existing Community area designation as Open Space or Agricultural, which protects and preserves Important Farmlands. Changes to Open Space or Agricultural designations would require a voter approval under the SOAR Initiative and would discourage loss of Important Farmlands. Furthermore, compliance with 2040 General Plan policies and implementation programs would reduce potential impacts of future development under the 2040 General Plan.

Under the 2040 General Plan future development of relatively higher intensity residential, commercial, mixed use, and industrial land uses would be concentrated within the Existing Community area designation (boundary) and the Urban area designation (boundary), which would lessen the potential for loss of Important Farmland and farms less than 10 acres. However, the planned land use designations of the 2040 General Plan would allow for future development that could result in the direct or indirect loss of Important Farmland (including Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance) that would exceed the County's established acreage limitation criteria for loss of farmland and result in the permanent loss of this valuable resource. Any future development that causes the loss of Important Farmland that exceeds the County's acreage limitation thresholds would be considered significant and the full extent of development and the potential for the direct or indirect loss of Important Farmland cannot be quantitatively determined at this time. Therefore, potential loss of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance as a result of future development under the 2040 General Plan would be **potentially significant**.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure AG-1: New Policy AG-X Avoid Development on Agricultural Land
 The County shall include the following new policy in the 2040 General Plan.

Policy AG-X Avoid Development on Agricultural Land

The County shall ensure that discretionary development located on land identified as Important Farmland on the State's Important Farmland Inventory shall be conditioned to avoid direct loss of Important Farmland as much as feasibly possible.

Mitigation Measure AG-2: New Implementation Program AG-X: Establish an Agricultural Conservation Easement

The County shall include the following new implementation program in the 2040 General Plan.

Implementation Program AG-X: Establish an Agricultural Conservation Easement

Applicants for discretionary projects that would result in direct or indirect loss of Important Farmland in exceedance of the acreage loss thresholds listed in the table below shall ensure the permanent protection of offsite farmland of equal quality at a 2:1 ratio (acres preserved: acres converted) through the establishment of an offsite agricultural conservation easement.

<u>General Plan Land Use Designation</u>	<u>Important Farmland Inventory Classification</u>	<u>Acres Lost</u>
<u>Agricultural</u>	<u>Prime/ Statewide</u>	<u>5</u>
	<u>Unique</u>	<u>10</u>
	<u>Local</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Open Space/Rural</u>	<u>Prime/ Statewide</u>	<u>10</u>
	<u>Unique</u>	<u>15</u>
	<u>Local</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>All Land Use Designations</u>	<u>Prime/ Statewide</u>	<u>20</u>
	<u>Unique</u>	<u>30</u>
	<u>Local</u>	<u>40</u>

If the Planning Division, in consultation with the Agricultural Commissioner, determines that a discretionary project would result in direct or indirect loss of Important Farmland in exceedance of the acreage loss thresholds listed in the table above, the project applicant shall prepare and submit a report for the review and approval of the Planning Division in consultation with the Agricultural Commissioner which identifies a minimum of one proposed potential mitigation site suitable for ensuring the permanent protection of offsite farmland of equal quality at a 2:1 ratio (acres preserved: acres converted) through the establishment of an offsite agricultural conservation easement. The contents of the report shall be determined, reviewed, and approved by the Planning Division in consultation with the Agricultural Commissioner (hereafter referred to as the "reviewing agencies"), and shall include information necessary for the reviewing agencies and a qualified entity responsible for holding the conservation easement to determine the viability of the proposed mitigation site for the establishment of a permanent agricultural conservation easement. Among the factors necessary for approval by the reviewing agencies, the proposed mitigation site shall be located in the

County of Ventura unincorporated area, must not already have permanent protection, and must be equivalent to or greater than the type of Important Farmland (e.g., Unique farmland) that would be converted by the project. Among other terms that may be required by the reviewing agencies in consultation with a qualified entity, the terms of an agricultural conservation easement shall include a requirement that it run with the land. Project applicants are responsible for all costs incurred by the County and the qualified entity to successfully implement this mitigation measure. Proof of the successful establishment of an agricultural conservation easement shall be provided to the Planning Division prior to issuance of a zoning clearance.

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measures AG-1 and AG-2 would reduce impacts to Important Farmland to the extent feasible, however any direct or indirect loss of Important Farmlands would be considered a permanent loss of a valuable resource. Establishing agricultural conservation easements would conserve Important Farmland within the county, but would not prevent the loss of existing Important Farmland. There are no actions or policies that the County could feasibly mandate to fully replace the loss of Important Farmland. Therefore, this impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Impact 4.2-2: Result in Classified Farmland Near Any Nonagricultural Land Use or Project ISAG Section 5b. uses the terminology “classified farmland” when referring to lands designated as grazing land, Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance. As discussed in Impact 4.2-2, the County protects and preserves agricultural land through the SOAR Initiative, Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy, Greenbelt Agreements, the Agricultural/ Urban Buffer Policy, the Right-to-Farm Ordinance, GP Policy AG-1.1, GP Policy AG-1.2, GP Policy AG-2.1, GP Policy AG-2.2, GP Policy AG-2.3, and Guidelines for Orderly Development.

Future development that could be accommodated under the 2040 General Plan is described in Impact 4.2-1. Existing classified farmland is located near several Existing Community area designations and Urban area designations in which relatively higher intensity residential, commercial, mixed use, and industrial land use designations are located. These include unincorporated areas to the north of the cities of Oxnard, Camarillo, Thousand Oaks, and Port Hueneme and to the east of Ojai as well as areas near SR 126 and SR 150. The actual location and siting details of future development under the 2040 General Plan in relation to classified farmland is not known at this time.

Residential growth in areas nearby agricultural lands has the potential to result in land use conflicts. Residential land uses are generally more sensitive and prone to conflict with adjacent agricultural land uses than commercial or industrial land uses. The placement of sensitive land uses, such as residences and schools, nearby classified farmland can negatively impact both uses due to conflict including odor nuisances and noise from agriculture machinery. The countywide Right-to-Farm Ordinance protects existing agricultural and farming operations from conflicts attributed to residential development. This is achieved through mandatory disclosure notifications to property owners who will be developing residential uses adjacent or near existing agricultural operations and protects farms from nuisance complaints associated with proper farming techniques. The intent of this ordinance is to properly inform and set realistic expectations for new residents or occupants of buildings located adjacent to farming operations. These practices are beneficial to all parties involved and ensure that a new purchaser of property is aware that existing agricultural operations inherently have noise, odor

and other potentially annoying activities that are associated with accepted agricultural operations. Furthermore, the County's SOAR initiative requires a majority vote of the people in order to redesignate land with an Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural land use designation. These voter initiatives prevent urban sprawl and protect greenbelt areas and agricultural uses from development impacts associated with nonagricultural uses.

The 2040 General Plan includes various measures to minimize conflicts between agriculture and urban land uses to ensure the long-term productivity of the agriculture sector. For example, Policies AG-1.1 and AG-1.2 protect and preserve agricultural land. The County's SOAR initiative requires countywide voter approval of most changes to the General Plan involving the Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural land use designations, and most changes to a general plan goal or policy related to those land use designations. Policy AG-2.1 ensures discretionary development adjacent to Agriculturally designated lands does not conflict with agricultural use of those lands. Policy AG-2.2 plans transportation and other County capital improvements to mitigate impacts to classified farmland as much as feasibly possible. Policy AG-2.3 maintains the County's Right-to-Farm Ordinance, which supports and provides a safeguard for existing agricultural and farming operations that could be threatened by encroaching residential development and reduces potential land use conflicts through the disclosure notifications provided to property owners who will be developing residential uses adjacent or near existing agricultural operations. The County of Ventura Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy protects the economic viability and long-term sustainability of agriculture in the county. When applicable, this policy conditions urban developments or nonagricultural uses to provide and maintain a 300-foot setback and chain-link fence on the nonagricultural property use, or a 150-foot buffer/setback if a vegetative screen is used.

In addition to the policies and implementation programs of the 2040 General Plan, the Piru, Ojai Valley, and El Rio/Del Norte Area Plans also contain policies to protect classified farmland from incompatible land uses. Based on review of the planned land use diagram and maps of classified farmland, these areas contain the most classified farmland or land designated as agricultural in the county. These Area Plans require additional review by the CAC of discretionary projects so as to prevent incompatible land uses adjacent to agriculture.

Future development under the 2040 General Plan would not be expected to result in adverse impacts to agricultural uses by locating non-agricultural development near classified farmland due to policies and programs that limit conflicts to agricultural uses, establish buffers between crop production, orchard production, classified farmland and nonagricultural uses, to minimize agricultural land conversion. Future growth and development are expected to occur near or within existing community boundaries and cities, pursuant to the Guidelines for Orderly development. Therefore, the potential for conflicts would be minimal. This impact would be **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required for this impact.

Impact 4.2-3: Conflict with Williamson Act Contracts or Agricultural Preserves

The LCA establishes eligibility criteria for Agricultural Preserves (AGP) and Land Conservation Act Contracts in the plan area. All land with an Agricultural land use designation on the General Plan Land Use Diagram is considered an AGP under the LCA. Land designated Open Space by the County General Plan is potentially eligible for an LCA contract and may or may

not be located within an AGP. LCA contracts protect agricultural lands through financial incentives for property owners in the form of a property tax reduction. Under the LCA program, land designated as Agricultural or Open Space is eligible for LCA contracts. Annually, three values are calculated for properties restricted under the LCA. The Ventura County Assessor's Office takes the following three valuations of properties under LCA contract: (1) the discounted factored base year value, (2) the restricted LCA value, and (3) the current market value. The lowest of the three values is enrolled under the LCA Contract (County of Ventura Assessor's Office 2013). Under the LCA contract property owners continue to receive a reduction of property taxes until the property owner or County initiates a nonrenewal or terminates the contract. In the year 2016, approximately 204,000 acres in the county were designated as AGP. Under the LCA program, land designated as Open Space or Agricultural is also eligible for wildlife habitat contracts. These contracts provide financial incentives for property owners similar to that for LCA contracts. The LCA contract would have to expire before a development project beyond what is allowed under the terms of that contract is permitted.

As discussed in Impacts 4.2-1 and 4.2-2 the 2040 General Plan would not result in changes to existing land use designations and, therefore, would not directly conflict with any LCA contracts and AGP. Additionally, the 2040 General Plan includes various policies and programs that would limit the conversion of agricultural lands to nonagricultural uses. As discussed in Impact 4.2-2, future residential development that could occur under the 2040 General Plan has the potential to locate sensitive uses nearby land under LCA contracts and AGP which may result in land use compatibility issues for lands under LCA contracts. The land use diagram of the 2040 General Plan would accommodate future development of relatively higher intensity residential, commercial, mixed use, and industrial land uses within the Existing Community area designation (boundary) and the Urban area designation (boundary). Excluding a small area north of the city of Camarillo and to the northwest of the city of Thousand Oaks, existing LCA contracts are not located adjacent to the Existing Community area designation (boundary) or the Urban area designation (boundary).

The 2040 General Plan includes several policies to minimize conflicts between LCA contracts and AGP with urban land in order to maintain LCA contracts and AGP designations. For example, Policies AG-1.1 and AG-1.2 protect and preserve agricultural land. The County's SOAR initiative requires countywide voter approval of most changes to the general plan involving the Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural land use designations, and most changes to a general plan goal or policy related to those land use designations. Policy AG-2.1 ensures discretionary development adjacent to Agriculturally designated lands does not conflict with agricultural use of those lands.

The County is responsible for ensuring that discretionary development adjacent to agriculturally designated lands does not conflict with agricultural use of those lands, which includes protection of agricultural land under LCA contracts and designated as AGP. Policy AG-2.2 requires transportation and other capital improvements as much as feasibly possible to mitigate impacts to Important Farmland. The 2040 General Plan Policy AG-2.3 maintains and updates the County's Right-to-Farm Ordinance as needed to protect agricultural land uses from conflicts with non-agricultural uses, as well as to help land purchasers and residents understand the potential for nuisance, (e.g., dust, noise, odors) that may occur as the natural result of living in or near agricultural areas. This Right-to-Farm Ordinance protects the farming community, including land under LCA contracts and AGPs, from developments that would inhibit their ability to continue agricultural production.

As discussed in Impact 4.2-2, the County's Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy protects the economic viability and long-term sustainability of agriculture in the unincorporated area. This policy would substantially lessen the potential conflict with LCA contracts or AGP by requiring buffers or screening between specified agricultural and non-agricultural land uses to prevent or minimize conflicts that may arise at the interface of agricultural lands and urban structures or ongoing non-farming activities. Most areas with a Residential, Mixed Use, Commercial, or Industrial land use designation under the 2040 General Plan would be located at least 300-feet from existing agriculture. Maintenance of the 300-foot buffer would minimize land use conflicts, as defined in the buffer policy. Reduction of land use conflicts encourages property owners to maintain their LCA contracts and AGP designations.

Development within the county would also be guided by nine existing Area Plans, which include additional policies designed to minimize conflicts between agricultural and nonagricultural land uses. Seven of these area plans have been reviewed and assessed to ensure internal consistency with the 2040 General Plan. The majority of recognized Important Farmland within the county is in unincorporated area. Of the seven, the Piru, Ojai Valley, and El Rio/Del Norte Area Plans were found to contain the most Important Farmland or land designated as agricultural. Applicable policies from the seven Area Plans are discussed in Impact 4.2-1. In alignment with the 2040 General Plan, these Area Plans require additional review by the Agricultural Department of discretionary projects so as to prevent incompatible land uses adjacent to agriculture.

No direct land use conflicts with existing LCA contracts would occur as a result of the land use diagram of the 2040 General Plan because it would not change the land use designation of any land under an existing LCA contract. No environmental impacts associated with residential development adjacent to any land under LCA/Williamson Act Contracts and AGP are expected to occur due to the protections and guidelines established in policies and programs that limit conflicts with agricultural uses and establishment of buffers between most agricultural and nonagricultural uses. Future growth and development are expected to occur near or within Existing Community area designation (boundary) and Urban area designation (boundary) , pursuant to the Guidelines for Orderly development. This impact would be **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required for this impact.

Impact 4.2-4: Conflict with Land Zoned as Forestland, Timberland, or Timberland Production Zone

The 2040 General Plan would not conflict with or result in a loss of land zoned as forestland, timberland, or Timberland Production Zone. The County of Ventura's NCZO regulates forest resources through Section 8104-6.2. This ordinance defines the purpose of the T-P zone, which are as follows: to maintain the optimum amount of the limited supply of timberland so as to ensure its current and continued availability for the growing and harvesting of timber, and compatible uses; to discourage premature or unnecessary conversion of timberland to urban area designations and other uses; and to encourage investment in timberlands based on reasonable expectation of harvest. The county does not contain land which produces timber commercially for eventual use as lumber or pulp; however, there are six Christmas tree farms totaling approximately 94 acres that are zoned Timber-Preserve (T-P) pursuant to the provisions of the Timberland Preserve Zone of the County NCZO. The 2040 General Plan proposes no changes to the existing Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural land use designations.

Therefore, the T-P zones would be compatible with the land use designations of the 2040 General Plan and no conflicts with land zoned as T-P would occur. The 2040 General Plan does not contain any programs or policies regarding timber resources. There are no specific programs or policies related to timber resources in the Area Plans. This impact would be **less than significant**.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required for this impact.

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