

**RIO VISTA AGRICULTURE WORKSHOP
SOLANO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN UPDATE
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
AGRICULTURAL SUBCOMMITTEE
July 25, 2007**

PURPOSE:

Discuss ideas, concepts and develop and identify issues that are important to the Solano County General Plan as it relates to agricultural production.

Ground rules

Start on time and end on time
Every opinion counts
Say it once and move on
One person speaks at a time
Respect others opinions
Keep on subject
Keep an open mind
Refrain from sidebars

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) **What one thing can the General Plan do to make a positive impact on agriculture?**
- 2) **How can the General Plan improve agricultural profitability or sustainability?**
- 3) **What county policies have impeded or improved agriculture?**

Question #1 What one thing can the General Plan do to a make a positive impact on agriculture?

Participant Responses

1. Make sure the Williamson Act doesn't get destroyed.
2. Keep people in the cities.
3. Keep urban development within the urban boundary.
4. Need better infrastructure, especially the roads.
5. Need to entice processing facilities here and ensure they are kept here and aren't zoned out. New processing facilities and distribution centers need to be kept local.
6. Someone in Resource Management should be a liaison between the county and farmers, like a land ombudsman type for farmers.
7. Must watch out for empire building; don't need more bureaucracy.
8. Treat agriculture as a business not just open space.
9. Development should be as least disruptive to agriculture as possible
10. (windmill is okay).

Question #2 How can the General Plan improve agricultural profitability or sustainability

Participant Responses

11. How do you define sustainable agriculture? Sustainability is a new buzz word that implies that whatever the economy does to sustain itself does not rely on outside forces.
12. Agricultural zoning needs to reflect the reality of the problem facing agriculture.
13. Zone it on productivity instead of soil type.
14. What is agriculture...how is it defined...are horses' agriculture?
15. Is it necessary that a family's total income comes from farming?
16. With 160 acres out here I cannot make a living at farming.
17. Should see if there is money that is not being passed through to special district by the county.
18. We have opportunities for olives and grapes in the hills and recreational opportunities, horses, etc. that are emerging. We need adaptability.
19. We need to be open to non traditional agriculture. Can make more growing almonds than raising lambs.
20. Minimum parcel size could go up and make it 320 acres. Should make it more difficult to break up parcels.
21. Could there be a zoning for small scale farming that is not rural residential?
22. Farming is more than parcel size; it is also management.
23. I don't know what is wrong with the General Plan; looking at the current plan it looks fine now....it doesn't have to be changed. I want to have infrastructure in the county that would enable us to move our products. As far as trying to tweak the General Plan I don't see anything to do.
24. I think that we might have to look at areas that may be developed but to say designate everything as agriculture is too simplistic.
25. Ian: I have a question for Harry. I was at the Suisun Valley meeting. If 20 acres is not working in Suisun Valley does that mean other parts of the county will be looking at different zoning? Harry: Looking at the intention of the categories: extensive, intensive, irrigated. The Future Studies Report will be part of the basis for the General Plan and area zoning.
26. Designate development to poorer, less productive soil types.

Question #3: What county policies have impeded or improved agriculture?

Participant Responses

27. Eliminate the tax on personal property (like taxes on an old tractor that has sitting out there for a long time). This is a tax that has cost me thousands of dollars.
28. I drilled a water well down 150 feet and the fees were \$4.57 per foot and the man was there less than a half hour; this is like extortion.
29. A lot of us put our workers in dilapidated housing and we have to do something about it. Permit fees on new dwellings are unbelievably high. Need to do something about that.
30. It's not only the fees it is also the harassment. The man from the county had complaints about the size of the letters on the mailbox and wanted to know if we had enough acres to support ourselves.
31. Can there be more than one house on 160 acres for farm labor housing?
32. For us to report hazardous material the fee goes up each year
33. There may be no service for 3 years but there is still a tax.

34. We went through a real hassle to get certified organically. After we did that got a visit from the pesticide person saying he needed to verify that the certifying agency did it right, so we had to go through the process again. It is a management problem.
35. There are limitations on farming such as environmental issues.
36. The soil classifications developed in the Midwest don't apply to California and the economical value of crops doesn't depend on the soil types.

Specific Issue Responses

Land Use

37. in 1980 the county defined agriculture in important areas and they valued agriculture and realized that you had to prevent conflicting uses.
38. Population growth is an inescapable factor. At some point the national, state and county levels need to face the decision to protect the land from population pressure. We need 160 acre zoning.
39. My family has been farming for years. Farmers don't collaborate like they used to.

Urbanization/Sprawl

40. What we are seeing in the county is a large group of people purchasing property as rural open space getting benefit of Williamson Act but not farming. They want to live in the county but don't farm. Only six (6) farms in Montezuma Hills make a living in farming.
41. There are urban pressures to preserve this area as is.
42. As agricultural land is developed we have to do something in Solano county to save the farm family and save the farm.

Economics

43. Across the county half the income of family farms come from off farm income.
44. It would be dangerous to say that in this part of Montezuma Hills that a farmer cannot survive without additional incomes.
45. What Ian said is true. Many families make a living here without outside income. The federal government was huge in this area with subsidized income because we are grain farmers....that has pretty much gone away.
46. We need to look at passing the farm to the next generation for farming.
47. One important issue is Proposition A has been very important in keeping urban development within urban boundaries and that is very important component in the future. How do you keep the premise of what is urban shall best in the cities?
48. Economics will always derive decisions and if someone has a lot of money to come into an area like Montezuma Hills to plant olives, etc they need deep pockets to do it. The economics of agriculture is going to dictate how this land will end up. Break it down into small parcels and it will destroy agriculture.
49. The whole wine industry in Napa snowballed and there is not a problem in Napa protecting farming. You can't have that happen without the land to draw the capital and management.

Next Steps:

- Review response at next meeting – August 9th at Alan Freese HQ office
 - Verification of Responses
 - Additional comments and suggestions
 - Detailed Discussion on Economics