

**VACAVILLE/ELMIRA WORKSHOP
SOLANO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN UPDATE
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
AGRICULTURAL SUBCOMMITTEE
July 11, 2007**

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

PURPOSE:

Develop ideas, concepts and express issues that are important to the Solano County General Plan as it relates to agriculture.

Introductory Questions:

- 1) What “one” thing could the General Plan identify/specify that would make the most positive impact in Solano agriculture?
- 2) What county policies/regulations impede or enhance agricultural production/ viability?
- 3) What county policies/regulations have improved agricultural viability?

Question #1: What “one” thing could the General Plan identify/specify that would make the most positive impact in Solano agriculture?

Participants Comments:

- There is a problem with “one size fits all” zoning without taking into account that there are different zones i.e. Montezuma Hills, Suisun Valley, etc.
- Current land use and zoning does not account for the unique areas of the county.
- We need to work on diversity of production and diversity of use. Property near the Interstate would have different use than out in the County,
- Need value added for smaller farms (i.e. 400 acres versus 1000 acres row crops)
- Need to treat agriculture like a business, just like other businesses)

Question #2: What county policies/regulations impede or enhance agricultural production/ viability?

Participants Comments:

- There is a problem with direct marketing if property is under a WA contract.

- Is the county's interpretation of the Williamson Act and asset for us or an impediment?
- How land is defined as extensive or intensive agriculture can be an impediment (i.e. irrigated versus non-irrigated). Agriculture is agriculture why make some areas special.
- What parcel size has to come into the picture as to whether that is a profitable farm?
- Are conservation easements a plus or minus? It goes back to what size the farm is for a conservation easement. If a smaller farmer is changing over he could go out of business. They tend to lock in value and make later capitalization on the property investment difficult.
- Eminent domain and deed restrictions on conservation easement could be a problem.
- If you have outside income or accessory income or employed off of the farm or have neighbors up in years I would encourage them to put their farm into agricultural conservative easement to lock in the value of that property without its speculative value and then I could buy it.
- There is a problem for fourth generation farmers. If you have oil wells and wind farms a conservation easement is okay. The smaller the farm it is not a good idea.
- At the agriculture round table in 2000 80% of property owners said that regulations and fees were #1 hindrance to profitability. Farmers raised this again this year. There is not the same type of profit with agriculture.
- There needs to be a change on the part of resource management regarding permit fees. Irrigated property gets \$2 an acre to test drain water on property...
- Need to discuss fees and regulations with ag commissioner and Resource Management Department...
- Should do like Sonoma county.
- Environmental resource flew over my property and made me remove tires.
- Taxed every year for chemical inspection but inspected only every 3 years for chemicals.

Question #3: What county policies/regulations have improved agricultural viability?

- No responses!

Taxes

Summary Statement: *The general feeling was that taxes along with fees are excessive. The concept of transfer taxes was discussed and general felt it could be advantageous to agriculture. The potential loss of the Williamson Act could have a detrimental effect on farming finances and force many growers out of business. The county should fight to keep it in effect. Participants felt that tax assessments should be based on the potential income from the property and not on its market value. Everyone acknowledge the value of Travis AFB, but pointed out that they do not pay property taxes yet their economic value to the county is similar to agriculture.*

- Taxes should be relevant to commodity being produced
- If we lose the WA our taxes will double or triple. Tax assessment is based on income off of property.
- A Transfer tax is implemented in some counties. It spreads tax burden around. When escrow closes the seller pays a transfer tax. The county should impose a transfer tax instead of dinging the farmer every time he turns around.
- Our farm gate values are lower now than 30 years ago while costs keep going up. We do not get COLA's.

- County Reserves should be used to do something positive for agriculture as it is the primary economic resource.
- Travis AFB and agriculture have similar economic value except that we pay taxes and they don't. They get all the attention from local government and we are only important around election time.
- Taxes should be relevant to the product generated (commodity).

Permits/Fees

Summary Statement: *In general, all participants felt that the permit/fee process is out of control and not relevant to the service provided. Like Winters and Dixon respondents, the participants felt that the county is not using a rural based fee structure and should use a fee structure is related to rural counties and similar areas. They did not feel that the service provided by the county is worth the fee costs.*

- Water well permits for ranchers: Permit was \$458 to drill hole. They came out one time for ten minutes and asked what water will be used for.
- There are fees for all kinds of tests...We need to hire a consultant to do county work,
- There is no differentiation between a farm and a subdivision. They charge the same fee and same guidelines as a developer, and it is wrong.....
- They raised fees for checking cattle scales from \$40 to \$140.
- Yolo County is better Ag oriented regarding permits, fees and regulations.....
- Eliminate fees
- System broke/bragging on reserves but not providing increased services return \$.31 on the dollar no return on investment.

Regulations

Summary Statement: Most felt that regulations, regardless of source – Federal, State or County – is relevant to the issues facing farmers. Most regulations are excessive and farmers have had little opportunity to provide input into the process. It was suggested that county departments that issue regulations should regularly attend Farm Bureau meetings and present their case and information.

- Process is cumbersome and difficult to understand. It is killing farming!
- County staff (resource management) should attend Farm Bureau meetings as does the Ag commissioner and Cooperative Extension. Could help them to get the word out as things change.
- County staff needs to be proactive instead of reactive.

Transportation

Summary Statement: *As with the Winters and Dixon areas, there is a problem with road maintenance and bicyclists on rural roads. The general feeling was that the bicyclists do not share the road and in many instances create a safety hazard. They also felt that consideration should be given to property located near freeways and major transportation routes for industrial development related to agriculture. This could provide additional value added economies to the farmers. Additionally, the farmers are concerned about*

heavy truck traffic on rural roads that cannot handle the loads; yet their access to their farms is critical to the movement of their crops to markets.

- The bicyclists are a problem; should license the bikes and fine them if not obeying the law of biking in a single file. They are not sharing the road but expect us too.
- The rural roads are in bad condition and there is a lack of infrastructure....
- Proximity to freeways benefits some individuals and industries. Freeway access in the rural areas should be value added industries that benefit farming.

Health And Safety

Summary Statement: *There was considerable discussion on rural fire protection and the response time by local fire districts. A recent incident accentuated the response time problem when one district, which was closer, was not notified of the fire and the primary districts response time was unacceptable. It was suggested that the county supervisors and LAFCO look seriously into this issue and consider a county wide fire protection district. Also, there was discussion on the need for fire suppression sprinkler systems on agricultural outbuildings and shops. It is expensive and not always cost effective. There was general agreement that the mosquito district has been responsive to their needs though there were some instances on non-responses by the district.*

- Fire protection is a big issue. A study by LAFCO needs to be done. Fire protection is based on 1920 boundaries and is not logical today.
- Response times are excessive since we have to put in sprinkler systems.
- We need a county-wide fire protection district.
- Why do we need sprinkler systems in outbuildings? It is our liability and the cost is excessive.
- We pay taxes for the Mosquito District, but I called the Mosquito District to come out and they didn't respond. There was a good response coming out to Hastings Island....

Buffer Zones

Summary Statement: *As with Winters and Dixon there was concern about who will pay for and maintain buffer zones or greenbelts. Participants also wanted to know what a precise definition of these zones is and what would be its use. There was not much support for buffer zones as open-space for public access. Some felt that smaller parcels (2.5 to 5 acre parcels could provide buffer zones, but the farmers will still have to deal with urban neighbors who do not understand agriculture and file complaints.*

- Who pays for buffer zones, the developer? If it isn't taken care of and maintained there can be problems with pests, etc.
- How do you define a buffer zone?
- Do we want to keep buffer zones private or public?
- Roads make good buffers.
- Why is farming expected to provide the buffer?
- Urbanization: 2.5 and 5 acre parcels prevents annexation and urban sprawl. Vacaville has been stopped from annexation in Browns Valley

Land use and zoning:

Summary Statement: *There was general agreement that what ever the outcome of the new general plan, the Orderly Growth Committee with sue to have their way. They felt that economic consideration of the productive of the land should have some bearing on the land use classification. Soil type is not the only factor and is antiquated. It was brought up that there are many parcels zones agriculture that are surrounded by rural residential classifications. They should be rezoned to similar classifications. They felt that there were too many parcels rezoned to smaller units that inhibit agricultural operations.*

- Orderly growth committee will sue if “what is urban shall be municipal” is changed.
- Some parcels surrounded by residential should be looked at and be made more accommodating. Abutting rural residential should be looked at for conversion and be contiguous.
- Economics leads agriculture not soil type.
- Twenty (20) acre parcels are taking up land that could be used for agriculture.
- Ag zones parcels surrounded by rural residential should be rezones to fit the area.
- Land filled areas not suitable for farming. Should be zoned industrial.

NEXT STEPS

- Participant responses will be mailed to all participants as soon as corrected.
- Meeting responses will be posted on the general plan website solanocountygeneralplan.net
- At the conclusion of the next meeting on August 1st a summary of all responses by category along with the raw data will be presented to the Citizens Advisory Committee. The Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors will also have access to this information.
- Plan to attend the final meeting on August 1st at SID to review all the participant responses and develop summaries of the information.