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## IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

### C. AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

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#### ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

##### Regulatory Setting

###### *Federal*

###### *Farmland Protection Act*

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), implements the Federal Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA). The purpose of the FPPA is to minimize federal contributions to the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural land uses by ensuring that federal programs are administered in a manner compatible with state government, local government, and private programs designed to protect farmland. The FPPA established the Farmland Protection Program (FPP). NRCS administers the FPP, which is a voluntary program that provides funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural use. This program provides matching funds to state, local, and tribal government entities and nongovernmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements. Participating landowners agree not to convert the land to nonagricultural land uses and retain all rights to the property for future agriculture production. A minimum 30-year term is required for conservation easements and priority is given to applications with perpetual easements. NRCS provides up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the easement.

###### *Land Capability Classification*

NRCS has prepared a soil survey for Riverside County, including a Land Capability Classification system that identifies soils by agricultural suitability based on the soil's ability to support common crops and pasture plants without compromising quality over the long term. The Land Capability Classification system uses eight Land Capability Classes (I through VIII) to rank soils. Class I and Class II soils compose Prime Farmland, whereas soils less suitable for farming are assigned classes with higher numbers.

###### *Storie Index*

NRCS also assigns Storie Index Ratings that rank soil characteristics according to their suitability for agriculture from Grade 1 soils (80–100 rating), which have few or no limitations for agricultural production and are considered prime soils, to Grade 6 soils (less than a rating of 10), which are not suitable for agriculture. Use of Storie Index ratings is another way to determine the presence of prime farmland. Under this system, soils identified as less than prime can function as prime soils when limitations such as poor drainage, slopes, or soil nutrient deficiencies are partially or completely removed. Grade 3 soils are only fairly well suited to intensively grown irrigated crops. Soils in Grades 4 and 5 are

generally only used for rangeland. Grade 6 soils are generally unsuited for any agricultural purpose. In addition, NRCS provides farmland classifications for individual soil units.

## State

### *Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act*

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act (Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act) (California Government Code Section 56000 et seq.) defines prime agricultural land according to several criteria, which include the NRCS's Land Capability Class System and the Storie Index. The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act defines prime agricultural land as:

*...an area of land, whether a single parcel or contiguous parcels, that have not been developed for a use other than an agricultural use and that meets any of the following qualifications:*

*(a) Land that, if irrigated, qualifies for rating as class I or class II in the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service land use capability classification, whether or not the land is actually irrigated, provided that irrigation is feasible.*

*(b) Land that qualifies for a Storie Index Rating of 80 through 100.*

*(c) Land that supports livestock used for the production of food and fiber and that has an annual carrying capacity equivalent to at least one animal unit per acre as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture in the National Handbook on Range and Related Grazing Lands, July, 1967, developed pursuant to Public Law 46, December 1935.*

*(d) Land planted with fruit or nut-bearing trees, vines, bushes, or crops that have a nonbearing period of less than five years and that will return during the commercial bearing period on an annual basis from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant production not less than four hundred dollars (\$400) per acre.*

*(e) Land that has returned from the production of unprocessed agricultural plant products an annual gross value of not less than four hundred dollars (\$400) per acre for three of the previous five calendar years.*

### *Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program*

The California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection, administers the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). Land is rated based on its soil characteristics and irrigation status. These ratings are then used to help prioritize farmland conservation efforts. The FMMP assigns one of four designations to farmlands: Prime Farmlands, Farmlands of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmlands, and Farmlands of Local Importance:

**Prime Farmland.** Includes land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained yields of crops when treated and managed. Such land must have been used for the production of irrigated crops within the last three years in order to be so designated.

**Farmland of Statewide Importance.** Land with a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. It must have been used for the production of irrigated crops within the last three years.

**Unique Farmland.** Land which does not meet the above criteria for Prime or Statewide Importance, but which is currently used for the production of specific high-value crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality and high yields of specific crops. Examples of such crops include oranges, olives, avocado, rice, grapes, and cut flowers.

**Farmland of Local Importance.** Non-irrigated land that is either currently producing crops or has the capacity of production. This land includes dry land grain, dairies, and other agricultural-zoned land not included in the above categories. This land may be important to the local economy due to its productivity.

#### *Williamson Act*

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act) is one agricultural conservation tool currently used in California. Under the Williamson Act, local governments can enter into contracts with private property owners to protect land for agricultural and open space purposes. This voluntary program offers tax breaks by assessing lands based on actual use (agricultural or open space) as opposed to their potential full market value. Local governments receive an annual subvention (subsidy) of forgone property tax revenues from the State via the Open Space Subvention Act of 1971. State payments were significantly reduced several years ago and were halted when the State stopped subvening funds in the 2009-2010 fiscal year because of the State's budget problems.

The Williamson Act program uses 10-year contracts that renew annually until either party files a notice of nonrenewal. If an owner decides to opt out, the land is still protected for 10 years while the tax liability increases in annual increments up to its full market value. Additionally, existing Williamson Act contracts on lands classified by the California Department of Conservation as Important Farmland can be extended to 20-year Farmland Security Zone contracts (i.e., super Williamson Act contracts), which offer landowners greater property tax savings. Statewide, more than 16.5 million acres have been protected under Williamson Act contracts, representing more than half of the State's agricultural and open space lands.

Riverside County designates all properties with Williamson Act contracts as Agricultural Preserves. According to the Department of Conservation, Williamson Act contracts for prime and non-prime agricultural land are located in the eastern part of the planning area in the Bautista Canyon area.

### *Nuisance Issues*

Encroachment of non-agricultural development in agricultural areas introduces issues such as land use and circulation conflicts, vandalism, and resident complaints about normal agricultural operations. The state recognized potential land use conflicts, and through Assembly Bill 1190 (Chapter 97, Statutes of 1992) amended provisions of the California Civil Code, such that existing agricultural processing facilities do not constitute a nuisance, provided they operate in a manner consistent with historic operations.

### *City*

The following are General Plan Policies that are relevant to agricultural resources:

- LU-2.8**      **Agriculture as a Permitted Use:** Allow for the continued production and use of agricultural lands as interim uses preceding urban development, or as long-term use.
- LU-3.8**      **Agricultural Buffers:** Maintain open space buffers between agricultural operations and new residential development to reduce potential conflicts.
- LU-15.8**    **Rural Residential and Agricultural Areas:** Promote healthy land use patterns by preserving scenic and open space resources, preventing inappropriate development in agricultural and rural areas, and developing or honoring incentives that preserve the economic value of agricultural and open space lands.
- OS-3.1**      **Conservation of Agricultural Land:** Support conservation of the remaining productive and prime agricultural lands in the planning area by encouraging their preservation, honoring the preservation easements that conserve Bautista Canyon land in perpetuity and seeking opportunities for additional preservation easements.
- OS 3.2**      **Riverside County Agricultural Land:** Coordinate with Riverside County to address the preservation of agricultural resources outside of the City's jurisdictional boundaries.
- OS-3.3**      **Land Use Compatibility:** Recognize and protect areas of agricultural production from the encroachment of incompatible land uses and establish appropriate buffers, disclosures, easements, and mitigation measures, as warranted.
- OS-3.4**      **Conservation Easements:** Secure scenic, resource, or other open space conservation easements, where feasible and suitable, as a means for protecting prime farmland located

adjacent to residential areas and where the property does not qualify for inclusion in an agricultural preserve program.

## **Agricultural Resources**

### ***Farmland***

The agricultural industry was once an integral part of the economy and culture of the San Jacinto Valley. However, as of 2010 there is little agricultural production in the City. Table IV.C-1 summarizes the inventory of Farmland in the City. Farmland located within the City comprises approximately three percent of all designated Farmland in Riverside County.

**Table IV.C-1  
Farmland Inventories in Hemet**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Acreage</b>
Prime Farmland	2,843
Farmland of State Importance	473
Unique Farmland	1,579
Farmland of Local Importance	11,522
Grazing Land	1,086
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,503</b>
<i>Source: City of Hemet General Plan 2010.</i>	

### ***Williamson Act Contracts***

A preservation easement held by the Wildlife Heritage Foundation conserves 486 acres in perpetuity, of which approximately 250 acres are suitable for citrus-fruit crops. Additionally, according to the Department of Conservation, several Williamson Act contracts for prime and non-prime agricultural land are located in the Bautista Canyon area. No portion of the Project site is under Williamson Act Contract.

### ***Project Site***

At least part of the Project site has been in crop production for 85 years or more. The previous landowner began farming the site in 1920, but farming use may predate that. The Project site remained in agricultural use after the Garrett Family acquired the property in 1960. In 1994, approximately two-thirds of the site was in agricultural use for vegetable row crops. This agricultural use continued and then decreased in 2001. In 2006, approximately 9.9 acres in the southeast corner of the Project site were under cultivation for lettuce, tomatoes, and corn, and irrigation water was obtained from a hydrant at Devonshire Avenue west of the Project site and conveyed to the cultivated area via an aboveground water line. The Project site is currently being used for dry farming. No portion of the Project site is designated as Farmland as designated by the California Department of Conservation, and no portion of the Project site is under Williamson Act Contract. A portion of the Project site is currently zoned A-5 (Heavy Agricultural).

However, the current General Plan land use designations for the Project site are Low-Density Residential and Mixed Use.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS**

### **Thresholds of Significance**

In accordance with Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, a project could have a significant environmental impact if the project would result in one or more of the following:

- a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;
- b) Conflict with the existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act Contract;
- c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (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]);
- d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use; or
- e) Involve other changes in the existing environment, which due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use.

For the reasons discussion in Section IV.A (Impacts Found to be Less Than Significant), the Project would not result in any significant impacts related to issues “a,” “c,” “d,” and “e.” Regarding issue “b,” the Project site is not under Williamson Act Contract. Thus, no further analysis of this issue is required. Project impacts related to potential conflicts with existing zoning for agricultural use are discussed below.

### **Project Impacts**

***Impact IV.C-1: The Project would not conflict the existing zoning for agricultural use, and no significant impacts related to this issue would occur as a result of the Project.***

The Project includes development of the Project site with residential land uses and would require changing the existing zoning and land use designation of a portion of the site from AG to Specific Plan. As discussed previously, a portion of the Project site is currently zoned A-5 (refer to Figure II-6 in Section II [Environmental Setting]). Also, off-site properties at the northwestern and northeastern boundaries of the Project site are zoned A-10 and A-5, respectively. However, the land use designations identified in the General Plan for the Project site include Low-Density Residential for the northern portion

of the site and Mixed Use for the mid to southern portions of the site (refer to Figure II-7 in Section II [Environmental Setting]). Similarly, the land use designations for the properties surrounding the Project site are also non-agricultural and include: Low-Density Residential to the north; High-Density Residential, Very-High-Density Residential, and Community Commercial to the east; Neighborhood Commercial and Community Commercial to the south; and Mixed Use to the west.

In 2010, the City updated its General Plan, changing the land use designation for the Project site and the surrounding properties to those listed in the previous paragraph, and adopting several polices to protect agricultural resources in the City. However, the City has not yet amended the zoning code to conform to the updated General Plan land use designations.<sup>1</sup> As discussed in the General Plan EIR, the General Plan is the City's policy document that sets forth direction and intent for development decisions, such as the types of land uses envisioned for the City, whereas the zoning code establishes specific standards by which land uses should be built. Although the Project would change the agricultural zoning for the Project site to Specific Plan, because the EIR prepared for the the General Plan already addressed impacts of changing the land use designations of the portions of the Project site previously zoned for agricultural land uses, and because the intended use of the Project site and surrounding properties does not include agriculture, the change in the zoning of the site would not result in conflicts with existing agricultural zoning. Thus, no impacts would occur as a result of the Project.

## **CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

Of the related projects shown on Table II-1 (refer to Section II [Environmental Setting]) that fall within City boundaries, related projects 2, 11, 12, and 13 are located on properties with agricultural zoning and include development of the properties with non-agricultural land uses, likely requiring zone changes to accommodate the proposed development. However, similar to the Project site, the General Plan land use designations for these properties are non-agricultural: the site of Related Project 2 is designated Very-High-Density Residential; the site of Related Project 11 is designated Community Commercial; the site of Related Project 12 is designated Low-Density Residential; and the site of Related Project 13 is designated Low-Density Residential. The EIR prepared for the General Plan already addressed impacts of changing the land use designations of these sites previously zoned for agricultural land uses. Thus, implementation of these related projects would not result in conflicts with existing agricultural zoning. Therefore, no cumulatively considerable impacts related to agricultural resources would occur.

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<sup>1</sup> *As identified in General Plan EIR Chapter 3, "Project Description," amendments to the Hemet Zoning Code to achieve consistency with the General Plan was identified as a subsequent project under the General Plan Program EIR. The General Plan includes new designations that need to be reflected in the Zoning Code. These include new zoning districts for mixed-use development.*

## **MITIGATION MEASURES**

No significant impacts related to this issue have been identified, and no mitigation measures are required.

## **LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION**

Impacts related to agricultural resources would be less than significant.