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Initial Discussion Draft (7-19-18)

Vision and Goals to Guide Review of Agricultural Land Use Policy in Contra Costa County

Setting:

Contra Costa County's rich soils, micro-climate, and reliable water supplies have allowed generations of farmers to produce a variety of crops in the County. Contra Costa farmers have grown food for the Bay Area since the Gold Rush; from vast fields of winter wheat in the 1880's to sweet corn, peaches and cherries. Before the prohibition, Contra Costa County was home to over fifty wineries, including the largest winery in the world for 12 years (1907-1919), Winehaven, in Richmond. East Contra Costa has a long history of agricultural tourism, including U-pick operations going back to the 1970s. Over 100,000 people travel to Brentwood to pick cherries over Memorial Day weekend. A wide diversity of crops are grown in Contra Costa County from sweet corn, stone fruits, vegetables, olives to wine grapes and beef.

Agricultural lands composed primarily of prime (Class I or II) soils are considered the very best soils for farming a wide variety of crops and are designated to preserve and protect the farmlands of the county that are most capable of, and generally used for production of food, fiber, and plant materials. All or nearly all the land with Class I or II soils currently used agriculture are located in the County's Agricultural Core east of Brentwood and intensively cultivated agriculture lands are primarily concentrated there and in the surrounding areas of Eastern Contra Costa County

Agriculture thrives in other areas of the County as well. The Tassajara Valley area supports thousands of acres of rangeland. That area is at a crossroad; historic farming and ranching activities are merging with rural residential, habitat conservation, public lands, and various other activities. Briones Morgan Territory..... Las Trampas....

History of Land Use Regulations:

In 1978, the Board of Supervisors adopted the *East County Area General Plan*, which included the new Agricultural Core (Ag Core) land use designation. The adopted policies were intended to preserve and protect East County's prime agricultural soils. In 1990, County voters approved Measure C, establishing the 65/35 Land Preservation Plan and Urban Limit Line (ULL) requiring at least 65 percent of all land in the county be preserved for "non-urban" uses such as agriculture, open space, wetlands, and parks. Measure C also required a 40-acre minimum parcel size for prime agricultural lands. In 2006, voters approved Measure L, which extended the term of the ULL through 2026 and placed limitations on changes to the boundary. The required 2016 review of the ULL determined capacity existed inside the ULL to accommodate jobs and housing growth through 2036.

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Policies have also been adopted to protect and encourage the economic viability of agricultural land. For example, the County has adopted Farmstand, Farm-Market, and Right to Farm Ordinances to protect existing uses and allow some new ones.

Vision and Goals for the Future of Agriculture in Contra Costa County:

Agriculture is an important pillar of the County's landscape and economy and a thriving and sustainable agricultural sector should remain a high priority for the County in setting land use policy. (better vision sentence?)

A key challenge in agricultural policy for the County is to further enhance the sustainability of agricultural lands by fostering a more vibrant agricultural economy.

The following are primary goals for the future of agriculture in Contra Costa County (please see rough draft ideas from staff below):

- Build on the unique assets of Contra Costa County to make agriculture more vibrant and sustainable. These assets include rich soils, the unique and varied climate, reliable water supply, proximity to a major metropolitan area, natural beauty and the recognized expertise of County farmers.
- Enable production of a diverse array of high-quality crops and agricultural products. The diversified production will make the agricultural sector more adaptable to changes in market conditions.
- Provide farmers greater opportunity to capitalize on the beauty, quality, diversity and accessibility of farmland in the County. Agricultural tourism opportunities should be supported and expanded.
- Protect natural resources that are necessary for a thriving agricultural economy, beneficial to the quality of life of agricultural residents and an important piece of the natural heritage of future generations (e.g. soil, water and water quality, air quality, biotic resources).
- Adapt regulation to meet the unique needs of the agricultural community, including making permitting as efficient as possible, communicating clearly with the agricultural constituency and ensuring that enforcement is effective.
- Improve quality of life of agricultural residents by enhancing livability of their communities and by retaining and enhancing the attractive, rural natural, agricultural character of the agricultural areas.
- Recognize that finite rural resources (water, transportation, space) require a balanced approach to a rural development.