

3.5 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section describes the existing agricultural resources within the County's Planning Area and analyzes the potential impacts of the proposed Area Plan policies on agricultural resources within the County. The County's Planning Area consists of unincorporated land outside the City's boundaries and adopted Sphere of Influence (SOI) but within the One Valley One Vision (OVOV) Planning Area boundaries. The City's Planning Area consists of its incorporated boundaries and adopted SOI. Both the County and the City Planning Areas comprise the OVOV Planning Area. The **Land Use Policy Map** is consistent with the proposed policies in that it will designate some areas within the County's Planning Area that are considered Important Farmland under the California Department of Conservation (CDC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), to Open Space and Non-Urban Land Use areas. There are some areas within the County's Planning Area that have been designated as Important Farmland by the CDC FMMP during their 2004–2006 mapping cycle; however, these areas have since then been approved and are undergoing the processes of conversion to urbanized land uses. Under the next update cycle (2006–2008 FMMP Mapping Cycle) these areas will appropriately not be designated as Important Farmland. Therefore, the proposed **Land Use Policy Map** and proposed Area Plan are consistent with non-conversion of Important Farmland, and would be considered less than significant under the *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines*.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Agricultural resources are classified by soil categories as defined by the federal government and farmland mapping categories as defined by the state. Soil categories are determined by the United States Soil Conservation Service and classified by agricultural potential. Farmland mapping categories are determined by the CDC.

Federal Soil Categories

The United States Soil Conservation Service groups soils into eight classes based on agricultural potential. This classification is dependent on slope, organic matter, flooding, and erosion hazards. Class I and Class II soils, often referred to as prime soils, are best for agricultural production. Such soils are deep, generally well drained, and easily worked. The western portion of the OVOV Planning Area contains small areas of soils determined to be soil Classes I and II which are considered Prime Farmland, while a vast portion of the western OVOV Planning Area is grazing land which are soils determined to be Class III to Class VIII.

The remainder of the Planning Area contains soils less suitable for agriculture, ranging from Class III to Class VIII.

State Farmland Mapping Categories

The CDC and the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts translate soil survey data into an “Important Farmland Series” of maps for the state’s agricultural counties by using the United States Soil Conservation Service soil classifications. These classifications of the CDC’s FMMP focus only on those lands that have been recently farmed. Land not recently farmed is not shown on the Important Farmland Series of maps.¹

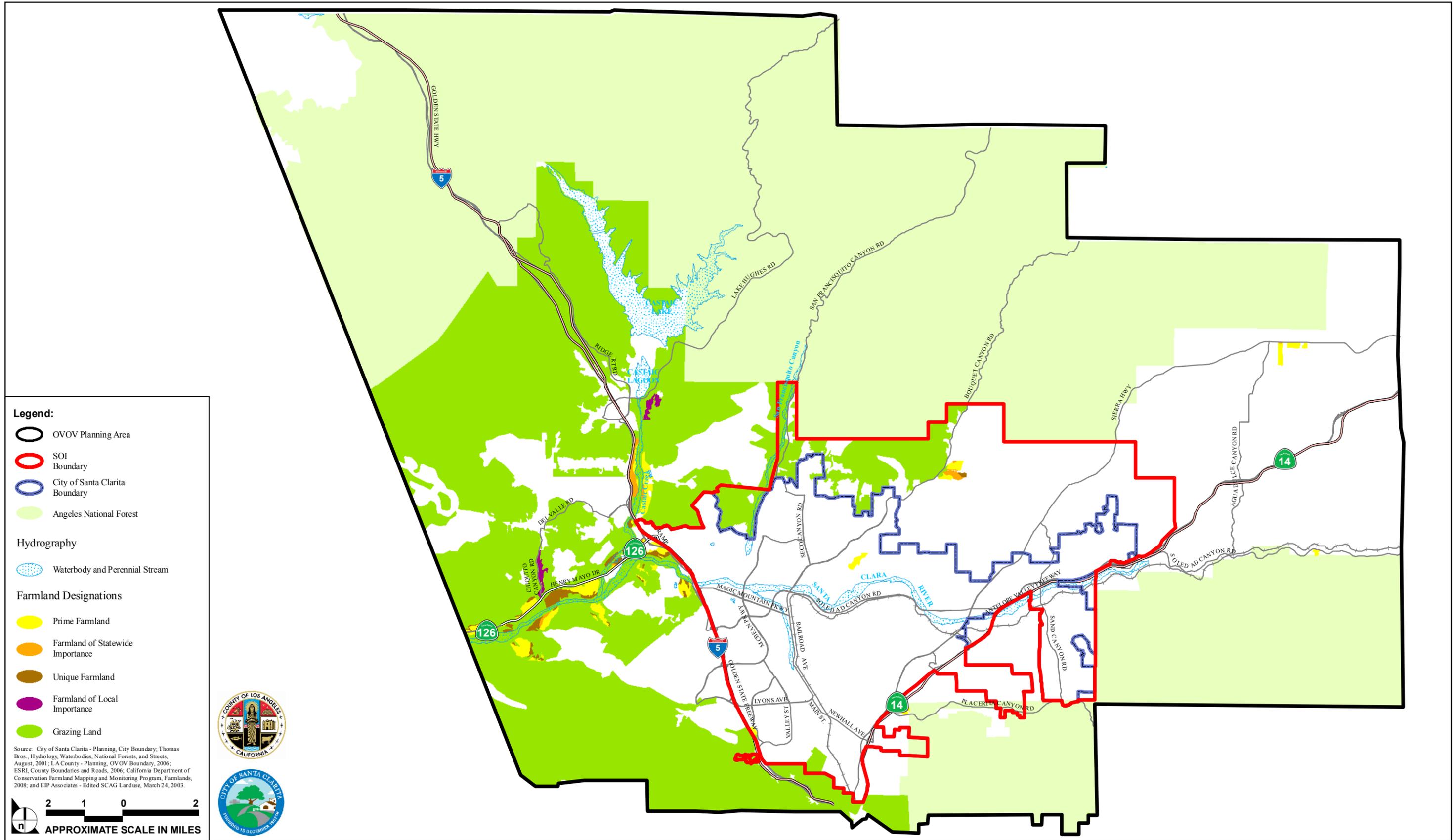
The Important Farmland Maps and the Advisory Guidelines for the FMMP identify five agriculture-related categories, as shown in **Figure 3.5-1, Farmland Designations within the OVOV Planning Area:**

- Prime Farmland
- Farmland of Statewide Importance
- Unique Farmland
- Farmland of Local Importance
- Grazing Land

Prime Farmland: Prime Farmland is land with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term production of agricultural crops. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. In order to have the Prime designation, this land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

Farmland of Statewide Importance: This farmland is similar to Prime Farmland but has minor shortcomings such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. In order to have the Farmland of Statewide Importance designation, the land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

¹ The California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program Maps are updated on a biennial basis.



SOURCE: City of Santa Clarita - Planning - 2009; Impact Sciences, Inc. - August 2009

FIGURE 3.5-1

Farmland Designations within the OVOV Planning Area

Unique Farmland: This farmland is of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state’s leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. In order to have the Unique Farmland designation, the land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

Farmland of Local Importance: This designation consists of soils of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county's board of supervisors. Los Angeles County defines farmland of local importance as producing lands that would meet the standard criteria for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance but are not irrigated.

Grazing Land: Grazing Land consists of existing vegetation that is suited to the grazing of livestock. The minimum mapping unit for Grazing Land is 40 acres.

State of California Agricultural Lands

As documented by the FMMP, the state’s important farmlands and grazing lands decreased by 170,982 acres (267 square miles) between 2002 and 2004.² The highest-quality agricultural soils, known as Prime Farmland, comprised 46 percent of the loss (78,575 acres). Accelerated urban development in the San Joaquin Valley and other inland locations contributed to a 10 percent increase (101,825 acres) in statewide urbanization in the 2002–2004 period relative to the 2000–2002 period. Both higher urbanization rates and a larger share of new urban lands for inland counties characterized development patterns during the 2004 mapping cycle. Ten counties accounted for 65 percent of all urbanization, led by Riverside and San Bernardino at 23 percent of the statewide total.³

Housing was the largest component of new urban acreage, with developments ranging from small infill sites to planned community units of 600 acres or more. Commercial uses (shopping, offices) and community facilities (schools, parks) were constructed in conjunction with the residential developments. Large site-specific developments included warehouse distribution facilities.

Commodity markets and other factors affect land management decisions, causing shifts both in and out of irrigated agricultural use. Conversion from grasslands to orchards, vineyards, and specialty crops were frequent in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but slowed significantly between the 2002 and 2004 updates (from 173,523 to 80,598 acres).⁴

² California Department of Conservation Division of Land Resource Protection, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, *California Farmland Conversion Report 2002-2004*, December 2006.

³ Ibid., 1.

⁴ Ibid., 2.

Land was removed from irrigated categories to uses aside from urban at almost the same rate as the prior update (189,980 acres in 2000–2002 and 188,109 acres in 2002–2004).⁵ This includes land idling, non-irrigated cropping, conversion to wildlife areas, low-density residential uses, mining, or confined animal agriculture facilities.

Nearly 40 percent of conversions out of agricultural uses statewide were to Other Land in the most recent update, an indicator that agricultural land-use dynamics in California are more complex than urbanization alone. The summary statistics for the conversion of land from agricultural use to non-agricultural use is described further in **Table 3.5-1, California Agricultural Land Conversion 2002–2004**.⁶

As shown in **Table 3.5-1**, the CDC has added an optional designation within its summary table called Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use. Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use is described by the CDC as existing farmland, grazing land, and vacant areas that have a permanent commitment for development.⁷ This designation allows local governments to provide detail on the nature of changes expected to occur to this land in the future.⁸ Therefore, according to the CDC approximately 58,242 acres of Important Farmland (approximately 19,319 acres of Prime Farmland; 3,469 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance; 6,058 acres of Unique Farmland, 7 acres of Irrigated Land, and 29,389 acres of Farmland of Local Importance) is expected to be converted to urbanized development in 2004 within the State of California.

Additionally, as shown in **Table 3.5-1** (in Part III) the CDC provides a breakdown of each land use category that was recorded during the 2002–2004 conversion period. The information within the table is raw data from Geographical Information Systems (GIS) within each county of the state which provided detail on every acre of change that occurred during the 2002–2004 time period. The changes recorded in Part III above results from revising the two-year-old linework based on new aerial photos and field verification.⁹

⁵ California Department of Conservation Division of Land Resource Protection, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, *California Farmland Conversion Report 2002-2004*, December 2006, 2.

⁶ California Department of Conservation, "Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program," Land Resource Protection, October 31, 2008. The latest data available for the California Agricultural Land Conversion is from the 2002–2004 conversion report. Data for 2004–2006 is being compiled at this time.

⁷ California Department of Conservation, *California Farmland Conversion Report 2002-2004*, (2006), 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

**Table 3.5-1
California Agricultural Land Conversion 2002-2004**

PART I Summary and Change by Land Use Category							PART II Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use	
LAND USE CATEGORY	Total Acreage Inventoried		2002-2004 Acreage Changes				LAND USE CATEGORY	Total Acreage 2004
	2002	2004	Acres Lost (-)	Acres Gained (+)	Total Acreage Changed	Net Acreage Changed		
Prime Farmland	5,154,782	5,076,207	108,028	29,453	137,481	-78,575	Prime Farmland	19,319
Farmland of Statewide Importance	2,731,723	2,691,258	56,850	16,385	73,235	-40,465	Farmland of Statewide Importance	3,469
Unique Farmland	1,289,076	1,275,092	49,024	35,040	84,064	-13,984	Unique Farmland	6,058
Irrigated Farmland	542,422	536,802	9,120	3,500	12,620	-5,620	Irrigated Farmland	7
Non-irrigated Farmland	9,076	7,461	1,721	106	1,827	-1,615	Non-irrigated Farmland	0
Farmland of Local Importance	2,848,040	2,854,727	92,452	99,139	191,591	6,687	Farmland of Local Importance	29,389
Important Farmland Subtotal	12,575,119	12,441,547	317,195	183,623	500,818	-133,572	IMPORTANT FARMLAND SUBTOTAL	58,242
Grazing Land	16,390,842	16,353,432	107,900	70,490	178,390	-37,410	Grazing Land	56,023
Agricultural Land Subtotal	28,965,961	28,794,979	425,095	254,113	679,208	-170,982	AGRICULTURAL LAND SUBTOTAL	114,265
Urban and Built-up Land	3,277,833	3,379,658	8,665	110,490	119,155	101,825	Urban and Built-up Land	0
Other Land	12,902,121	12,969,764	79,139	146,782	225,921	67,643	Other Land	45,898
Water Area	704,435	705,949	195	1,709	1,904	1,514	Water Area	0
Total Area Inventoried	45,850,350	45,850,350	513,094	513,094	1,026,188	0	TOTAL ACREAGE REPORTED	160,163

PART III Land Use Conversion from 2002 to 2004

LAND USE CATEGORY		Prime Farmland	Farmland of Statewide Importance	Unique Farmland	Farmland of Local Importance	Interim Categories	Subtotal Important Farmland	Grazing Land	Total Agricultural Land	Urban and Built-up Land	Other Land	Total Converted To Another Use
Prime Farmland ¹	to:	--	84	1,968	40,702	--	42,754	15,785	58,539	20,771	28,718	108,028
Farmland of Statewide Importance	to:	103	--	411	28,657	--	29,171	4,644	33,815	7,055	15,980	56,850
Unique Farmland	to:	1,031	183	--	13,722	--	14,936	18,089	33,025	2,972	13,027	49,024
Irrigated Farmland	to:	--	--	--	--	18	18	5,246	5,264	335	3,521	9,120
Non-irrigated Farmland	to:	--	--	--	--	338	338	1,186	1,524	0	197	1,721
Farmland of Local Importance	to:	13,284	8,348	14,701	--	--	36,333	11,646	47,979	18,621	25,852	92,452
Important Farmland Subtotal		14,418	8,615	17,080	83,081	356	123,550	56,596	180,146	49,754	87,295	317,195
Grazing Land	to:	6,292	3,394	12,844	6,859	1,403	30,792	--	30,792	20,671	56,437	107,900
Agricultural Land Subtotal		20,710	12,009	29,924	89,940	1,759	154,342	56,596	210,938	70,425	143,732	425,095
Urban and Built-up Land	to:	990	463	345	988	65	2,851	1,055	3,906	--	4,759	8,665
Other Land	to:	7,753	3,913	4,771	8,211	1,782	26,430	12,839	39,269	40,065	--	79,334
Total Acreage Converted	to:	29,453	16,385	35,040	99,139	3,606	183,623	70,490	254,113	110,490	148,491	513,094

Source: California Department of Conservation, Department of Land Resource Protection, Farm Land Management Program, 2000–2002 Agricultural Land Conversion Report, Table A-42, accessed at http://www.consrv.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/stats_reports/farmland_conv_reports.htm.

¹ Conversion to Unique Farmland due to delineation of potted plant nurseries throughout the county.

² The 2002–2004 Land Use Conversion was the most current data at time of publication according to the California Department of Conservation – Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, May 12, 2008. <http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/products/Pages/ReportsStatistics.aspx>.

According to Part III of **Table 3.5-1** above, a total of 29,453 acres of Agricultural Land, Urban and Built-up Land, and Other Land was converted to Prime Farmland, while a total of 108,025 acres of Prime Farmland that was inventoried was converted to non-Prime Farmland designations. A total of 16,385 acres of Agricultural Land, Urban and Built-up Land, and Other Land was converted to Farmland of Statewide Importance, while a total of 56,850 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance was converted to non-Farmland of Statewide Importance designations. A total of 35,040 acres of Agricultural Land, Urban Land and Built-Up Land, and Other Land was converted to Unique Farmland, while a total of 49,024 acres of Unique Farmland was converted to Non-Unique Farmland designations. A total of 99,139 acres of Agricultural Land, Urban Land and Built-Up Land, and Other Land was converted to Farmland of Local Importance, while a total of 92,452 acres of Farmland of Local Importance was converted to Non-Farmland of Local Importance designations.

State of California Land Use Conversion

California experienced record agricultural land decreases between 2002 and 2004, as overall urbanization increased by 10 percent (101,825 acres) over the 2000–2002 period. Yet urbanization alone did not account for the 78,575-acre net loss in Prime Farmland, 40,465-acre net loss of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and the 13,984-acre net loss of Unique Farmland, between 2002 and 2004. Land idling, ecological restoration projects, and other conversions contributed to a net loss of 138,644 acres of irrigated land statewide (the total net acreage change of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Irrigated Farmland from 2002 to 2004).

The conversion of grazing and pasture areas to vineyards, orchards, and specialty crops is one trend that had helped offset agricultural land losses.¹⁰ In the last decade this trend has declined. Agricultural upgrades of this kind totaled 80,598 acres between 2002 and 2004, less than half of the 2000–2002 acreage.

Table 3.5-2, Top Counties with Irrigated Land Converted to Urban Land, shows the top 10 counties in the State of California that converted irrigated land to urbanized land. Los Angeles County was not one of the top 10 counties with irrigated land that was converted to urban land in the last two cycle periods.

¹⁰ California Department of Conservation, California Farmland Conversion Report 2002–2004, (2006), 11.

**Table 3.5-2
Top Counties with Irrigated Land Converted to Urban Land**

2000–2002 Period		2002–2004 Period	
County	Acres of Urban Land	County	Acres of Urban Land
San Joaquin	4,518	Kern	4,275
Riverside	2,488	Stanislaus	3,460
San Bernardino	2,195	Riverside	2,485
Tulare	1,861	San Joaquin	2,239
Stanislaus	1,778	Fresno	2,081
Orange	1,547	Sacramento	1,431
Kern	1,212	Tulare	1,377
Fresno	1,147	San Bernardino	1,243
Yolo	960	Merced	1,058
Santa Clara	858	Imperial	1,047

Source: California Department of Conservation Division of Land Resource Protection, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, California Farmland Conversion Report 2002-2004, May 2008.

Net Land Use Changes in the State of California

Urban land in California expanded by 101,825 acres (159 square miles) between 2002 and 2004, a 10 percent increase compared to the 2000–2002 period. Prime Farmland accounted for 19 percent of the urbanization, and 9 percent occurred on other irrigated classes.

The new irrigated farmland loss, 138,644 acres was more than twice as large as it has been during the prior update (53,963 acres). Prime Farmland loss during the 2002–2004 cycle was the largest in FMMP's history (78,575 acres).

County Planning Area

Farmland Categories

Within the County's Planning Area, the acreage of Important Farmlands as designated on the state's Farmland Map is shown in **Table 3.5-3, Important Farmland Designations:**

**Table 3.5-3
Important Farmland Designations**

Important Farmland Designations	Acres
Prime Farmland	1,235
Unique Farmland	364
Farmland of Local Importance	130
Farmland of Statewide Importance	178
Total Important Farmland	1,907

These designated farmlands occur in scattered locations within the County's Planning Area, as shown above in **Figure 3.5-1**. The largest areas of Important Farmland are located along the Santa Clara River in the western portion of the County's Planning Area, north and south of State Route 126 in the area slated for development of Newhall Ranch. Designated farmlands extend along the east side of Interstate 5 along Castaic Creek, along San Francisquito Canyon, and near the intersection of Bouquet Canyon Road, are generally smaller in scale; some are used for horse ranches, non-irrigated cropland, improved pasture lands, and vineyards. Additionally, Prime Farmland is located in the northeastern portion of the County's Planning Area along Sierra Highway and along a small portion between California State Route 14 and Placerita Canyon Road. Where appropriate, these lands will be protected from urban development through designation of a Non-Urban land use category on the Area Plan land use map. For isolated remnants of farmland which no longer are used for agricultural production, urban land use designations are utilized.

The largest category of designated farmland in the County Planning Area is Grazing Land, which includes 63,635 acres within the County's Planning Area. Much of this land will remain vacant in the undeveloped foothills within the County's Planning Area and adjacent to U.S. Forest Service Land. Land use designations for these areas are designated as Non-Urban, allowing low-density development on large lots to maintain the rural and open character of designated Grazing Land.

Existing Agricultural Uses in the County's Planning Area

Approximately 2,773 acres of existing agricultural uses are located within the County's Planning Area. Existing agricultural uses within the County's Planning Area include

- 6 acres of Dairy, Livestock and Associated Facilities;

- 547 acres of Horse Ranches;
- 1,663 acres of Irrigated Cropland and Improved Pasture;
- 275 acres of Non-Irrigated Cropland and Improved Pasture Land;
- 2 acres of Nurseries;
- 65 acres of Orchards and Vineyards;
- 212 acres of Other Agriculture; and,
- 2 acres of Poultry Operations.¹¹

Agricultural uses are located primarily in the western portion of the County's Planning Area, as seen in **Figure 3.5-2, Agricultural Production within the OVOV Planning Area**. Limited agricultural uses exist in the far eastern portion of the County's Planning Area, which include areas adjacent to Soledad Canyon Road. Irrigated croplands and improved pasture lands are located primarily along State Route 126, Interstate 5, and Castaic Creek, in the western portion of the County's Planning Area. Horse ranches, non-irrigated croplands and improved pasture lands are concentrated along Interstate 5, San Francisquito Canyon, and Bouquet Canyon Road. Active orchards and vineyards are also located along Sierra Highway in the northeast portion of the OVOV Planning Area.

Agricultural Preserves within the County's Planning Area

Agricultural Opportunity Areas

Agricultural Opportunity Areas (AOAs) are a Los Angeles County identification tool that indicates land where commercial agriculture is taking place and/or is believed to have a future potential based on the presence of prime agricultural soils, compatible adjacent land uses, and existing County land use policy. Local planning efforts can identify AOAs in their community-based plans, and the County supports communities in establishing more detailed land use policy related to agricultural levels at the community level.

The intent of the Area Plan is to protect the County's agricultural resources from the intrusion of incompatible land uses that conflict with or preclude viable agricultural activity. Agricultural uses are

¹¹ Caitlin Morais, City of Santa Clarita, e-mail correspondence with Judith Charles, Impact Sciences, Inc. October 13, 2008.

encouraged in appropriate areas throughout the County and are not limited by the mapped boundaries of designated AOAs. Applications for non-agricultural uses in these areas are evaluated for their impact on adjacent agricultural operations.

Williamson Act Contracted Lands

Commonly referred to as the Williamson Act, the California Land Conservation Act of 1965¹² enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments which are much lower than normal because they are based upon farming and open space uses as opposed to full market value. To compensate for this loss in revenue, local governments receive an annual subvention from the state via Open Space Subvention Act of 1971. The only Williamson Act contract in the County is for the preservation of open space on Catalina Island. There are no Williamson Act contracted lands within the County's Planning Area.

Urban-Agricultural Interface

Retaining valuable farmland in the County is expected to be difficult as projected growth in the County over the next 20 years is expected to continue. Increased population growth accompanying development may result in the conversion of farms and land with prime soil to non-agricultural uses. This scenario is especially troublesome for the North County area, which contains most of the Prime Farmland in the County, and is also experiencing the most rapid population growth.

Residents of new housing developments often voice concern over odors, dust, and pesticides from neighboring farms. In an effort to avoid such conflicts, the County designates areas surrounding agricultural lands as rural, allowing for rural development that is compatible with agricultural activities. Furthermore, the County encourages agricultural activities and agricultural development that do not affect the water quality of the County's water bodies.

Agricultural Water

The active agricultural land that is within the County's Planning Area uses water to produce viable crops. The amount of agricultural water that is used on these active agricultural lands within the County's Planning Area boundaries is further discussed in **Section 3.13, Water Services**, of this EIR. The Agricultural Land that is within the County's Planning Area uses approximately 5.9 acre-feet of water per

¹² California Government Code, Section 51200, Williamson Act.

acre per year. One policy area that has significantly impacted agricultural activities is that of water supply. Historically, water supplies within the Antelope Valley region have been used primarily for agriculture. However, due to population growth, water demands from residential and commercial uses have increased significantly. With drought conditions worsening the County's water supply, there are growing conflicts in northern County communities about how best to use existing water resources; for agricultural activities or for new development. Los Angeles County recognizes the importance of balancing the water needs of both farmers and residents.

Agricultural Pests and Diseases

The Ventura County Initial Study Assessment Guidelines¹³ present criteria for determining whether a proposed use may have a significant adverse impact on agriculture by the introduction of or increased potential for agricultural pests and/or diseases.¹⁴ The Ventura County Initial Study Assessment Guidelines define this issue as "pests/diseases mean the direct or indirect introduction of biological organisms that may be harmful to agricultural production. Indirect introduction can occur when a use will cause a decrease in beneficial organisms or natural or man made protection against harmful biological organisms." Any proposed non-agricultural land use/development located on or within 0.25 mile of property currently in, or suitable for, agricultural production may have an impact.

The Ventura County Initial Study Assessment Guidelines use the following definitions:

Disease – An abnormal condition of an organism or part, especially as a consequence of infection, weakness, or environmental stress, that impairs normal physiological functioning.

Biological Organism – A living entity, a plant, animal, bacterium, virus, or other entity that lives and is capable of reproduction.

Pest – Any plant, animal or living organism that is harmful to agricultural production.

¹³ The Ventura County Initial Study Assessment Guidelines is being used in this document as a response to the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's Office comment to the NOP regarding the possibility of pests impacting development that is proposed adjacent to agricultural lands.

¹⁴ Ventura County, Initial Study Assessment Guidelines, February 2006, p. 42.

Legend:

- OVOV Planning Area
- SOI Boundary
- City of Santa Clarita Boundary
- Angeles National Forest

Hydrography

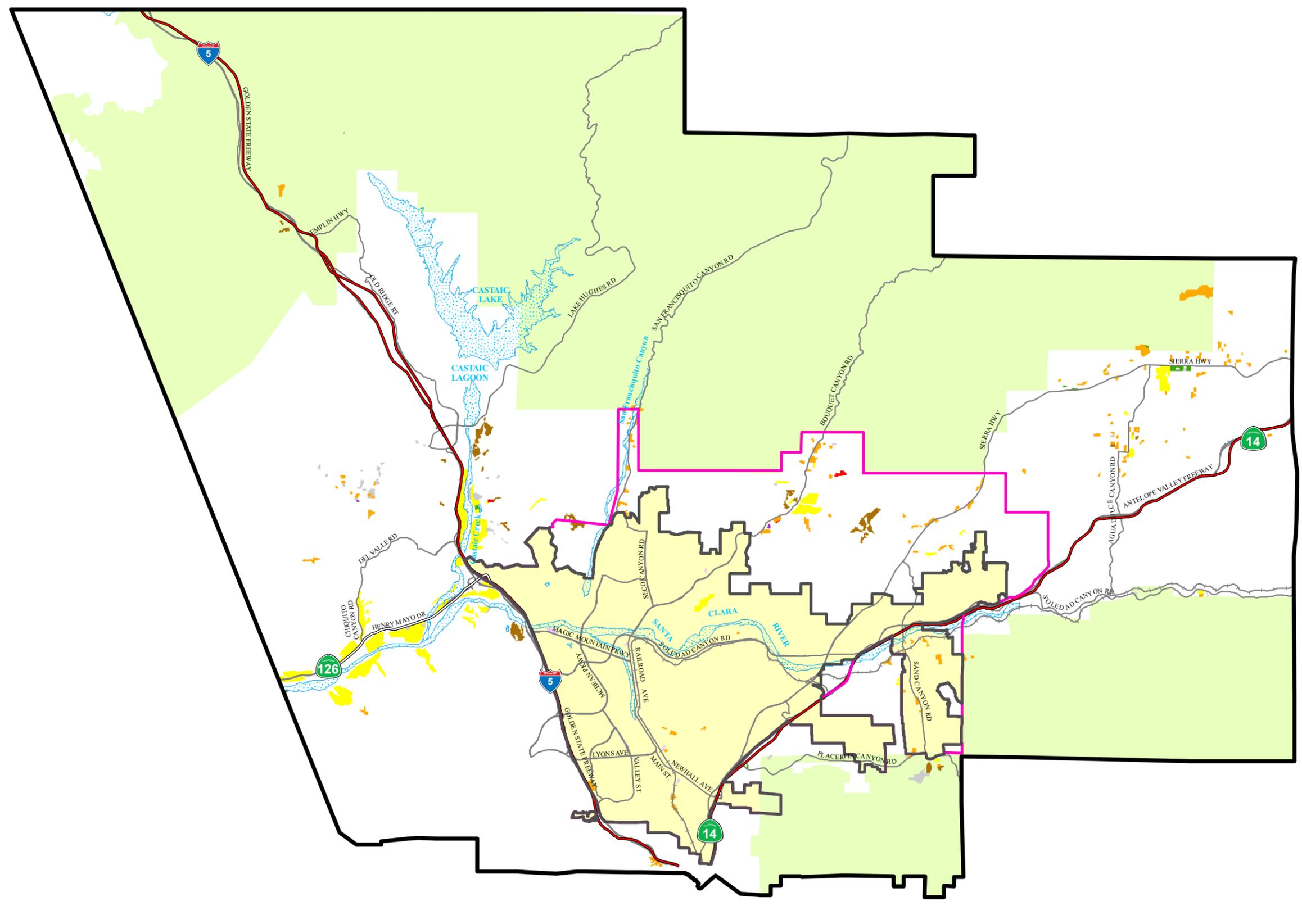
- Waterbody and Perennial Stream

Agricultural Lands

- Dairy, Livestock, and Associated Facilities
- Horse Ranches
- Irrigated Cropland and Improved Pasture Land
- Non-Irrigated Cropland and Improved Pasture Land
- Nurseries
- Orchards and Vineyards
- Other Agriculture
- Poultry Operations

Source: City of Santa Clarita - Planning, City Boundary; Thomas Bros., Hydrology, Waterbodies, National Forests, and Streets, August, 2001; LA County - Planning, OVOV Boundary, 2006; ESRI, County Boundaries and Roads, 2006; California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, Farmlands, 2008; and EIP Associates - Edited SCAG Landuse, March, 2005.

APPROXIMATE SCALE IN MILES



SOURCE: City of Santa Clarita Planning - 2009; Impact Sciences, Inc. - August 2009

FIGURE 3.5-2

Agriculture Production within the OVOV Planning Area

The proposed Area Plan contains non-agricultural land uses that are within 0.25 mile of existing active agricultural areas. The County Agriculture Commissioner monitors all aspects of the agricultural production in the County and has the duty to exercise the powers and duties of that office to protect the environment, as it relates to agricultural activities, from adverse effects of biological organisms released into the environment and to protect beneficial biological organisms in the County. The Agricultural Commissioner is authorized to import, collect, release, destroy, and propagate of beneficial organisms when such action is deemed to be in the best interest of agricultural activities in the County and its environment.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

In order to assist in determining whether a project will have a significant effect on the environment, the *State CEQA Guidelines*, Appendix G, identify criteria for conditions that may be deemed to constitute a substantial or potentially adverse change in physical conditions.

Significant agricultural resources impacts will result if

- there is a conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Department of Conservation Division of Land Resource Protection, to non-agricultural use; and,
- there will be exposure of future residents to nuisances associated with agricultural operations or expose farms to nuisances associated with urban uses.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

The following text discusses the potential impacts on agricultural resources within the County's Planning Area per the proposed Area Plan goals, objectives and policies and the *State CEQA Guidelines* thresholds of significance criteria.

Impact 3.5-1 **There is a conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the Department of Conservation Division of Land Resource Protection, to non-agricultural use.**

The CDC updates their Important Farmland Maps through the FMMP on a biennial basis. The latest update for the County of Los Angeles is for 2004–2006. Under the current **Land Use Policy Map** areas of Important Farmland (according to the 2004–2006 FMMP Map) are currently designated as Urbanized

land uses, as shown on **Figure 3.5-1**. The following is a list of the areas that are designated as Important Farmland under the 2004–2006 FMMP Mapping, but are currently under an urbanized state:

- Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland west of Interstate 5, north and south along California Route 126 These areas have already been designated as Specific Plan (SP) under the currently adopted Land Use Policy Map. These areas are within the Newhall Ranch Specific Plan, which have been previously approved by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, and will be converted, to urban uses over a buildout period of 20 years. The EIR for the Specific Plan analyzed the impacts of the conversion of these important farmland areas to urbanized land uses.
- Two areas of Prime Farmland and Unique Farmland along the western side of Interstate 5, south of California Route 126. These areas have already been designated for urban uses as Major Commercial (CM) (Industry and Commercial) under the currently adopted Land Use Policy Map. These areas are no longer used as farmland and portions have been recently developed with a shopping center and an office building. The Area Plan anticipates additional commercial development in these areas, as they have relatively close topography, are within close proximity to major transportation corridors, and can provide additional employment opportunities for Santa Clarita Valley residents.
- Areas of Prime Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance located along I-5 on its eastern side north of Del Valle Road. These areas are already designated as Public and Semi-Public Facility (P) under the existing **Land Use Policy Map**. These designations are appropriate because these areas are owned by the County of Los Angeles and are part of the Peter Pitchess Detention Center (also known as the Wayside Honor Rancho).
- Areas of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance located on the eastern side of Bouquet Canyon Road These areas are no longer used as farmland and are the subject of a pending development application (Tract 52193). The Area Plan anticipates urban residential development in these areas, as they have relatively level topography, are adjacent to major highways, and can provide additional housing opportunities for a growing population.

Upon implementation of the Area Plan, the proposed **Land Use Policy Map** will continue to designate these areas as urbanized land use.

Although this is not consistent with the proposed policies and would represent a significant impact under *State CEQA Guidelines*, the updated 2006–2008 Important Farmland Map for the County of Los Angeles should declassify these areas as Important Farmland due to the urbanization that has occurred on these lands since the last FMMP update, in 2004–2006. This would reduce impacts on these parcels to a less than significant level.

There will also be areas of Important Farmland within the County Planning Area that will be designated as Rural land use where appropriate (**Policy LU 1.1.7** and **Policy CO 10.1.9**). These areas of Important Farmland are located as describe below:

- An area of Farmland of Statewide Importance located in between the tributary of San Francisquito Canyon and San Francisquito Canyon Road, which will be designated as Rural land under the proposed **Land Use Policy Map**;
- An area of Prime Farmland and Unique Farmland located on the western side of Bouquet Canyon Road, which will be designated Rural Land 2 (RL2) on the proposed **Land Use Policy Map**;
- An area of Prime Farmland located just south of Sierra Highway, which will be designated as Rural Land 20 (RL20) on the proposed **Land Use Policy Map**; and
- An area of Prime Farmland located south of California Route 14 and north of Placerita Canyon Road, which will be designated as Rural Land 20 (RL20) on the proposed **Land Use Policy Map**.

Proposed **Policy LU 1.1.7** will help to conserve these above mentioned existing lands designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance. The Open Space designation is intended to identify and reserve land for both natural and active open space uses, including public and private parks, conservancy lands, nature preserves, wildlife habitats, water bodies and adjacent riparian habitat, wetlands areas dedicated to open space use, drainage easements, cemeteries, golf courses, and other open space areas dedicated for public and private uses. Typical uses include recreation, horticulture, limited agriculture, animal grazing, and habitat preservation. The Non-Urban/Agricultural land use designation would provide for non-urban lands that are used for low-density residential uses on large lots, in areas characterized by rural development interspersed with natural open space. Agricultural lands would be included and used for grazing, horticulture, row, field, and tree crops, and limited keeping of livestock, horses and other large animals.

Important Farmland (land designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance) is being lost to urban expansion near existing cities. For farmers, urban encroachment adversely affects the efficiency of remaining farming operations due to increase air pollution, livestock predation by pets, crops disease resulting from inadequate care of off-farm ornamental plants, restrictions on pesticide use and burning, and requirements to set aside on-farm buffer zones. At the same time, production costs increase due to rising land values, water scarcity, theft, and vandalism of farm equipment, crop pilferage, road congestion, and personal injury liability resulting from trespassing on farms. By reducing the profitability of remaining farming operations, urban encroachment tends to have a spiraling effect, encouraging further losses of farms to urban development.

The amount of Important Farmland that is being converted within County's Planning Area is relatively small compared to the inventoried amount of Important Farmland within the State of California. However, when comparing the amount of Important Farmland that would be converted in the County's Planning Areas, compared to the amount of inventoried acres of Important Farmland within the County

of Los Angeles, the amount that would be converted from implementation of the Area Plan, would be substantial. This is due to the potential decrease of county and state agricultural economies due to the conversion of these Important Farmlands to urban land-uses. However, the implementation of the Area Plan would conserve the areas designated as Important Farmland (as discussed above) through the below mentioned policies (land designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance) as designated by the CDC FMMP

Proposed Area Plan Policies

Policy LU 1.1.7: Preserve and protect important agricultural resources, including farmland and grazing land, through designating these areas as Rural Land on the Land Use Map where appropriate.

Policy CO 10.1.9: Preserve forested areas, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and corridors, wetlands, watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, and other open space that provides nature carbon sequestration benefits.

Effectiveness of Proposed Area Policies

Implementation of **Policy LU 1.1.7**, and **Policy CO 10.1.9**, as discussed above, would provide the conservation needs for Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance located within the County's Planning Area, and thus would not result in the urbanization of these Important Farmlands. The **Land Use Policy Map** would, therefore, be consistent in providing that these Important Farmland areas are designated as Rural designations on the proposed **Land Use Policy Map**; therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Impact 3.5-2 **Potentially expose future residents to nuisances associated with agricultural operations or expose farms to nuisances associated with urban uses.**

Implementation of the Area Plan will result in urbanized land uses being adjacent to Open Space and Non-Urban/Agricultural land uses that will contain existing agricultural operations. Typically where non-agricultural land uses extend into agricultural areas or where they exist side by side, agricultural operations often become the subject of nuisance complaints. As a result, some agricultural operations are forced to cease or curtail operations, others are discouraged from making investments in farm improvements, and efficient agricultural production is generally discouraged due to burdensome litigation against farmers.

The implementation of the Area Plan could result in nuisance complaints from future residents in regards to the operations of existing agricultural operations. Additionally, nuisance complaints from existing agricultural operators could be voiced in regards to urbanized land uses being in close proximity of the agricultural operations. Nuisance complaints such as pilferage, vandalism, excessive noise, odors, pesticide overspray, and increased rodent/pest populations could result from the existence of agriculturally active operations existing adjacent to urbanized areas. Therefore, implementation of the Area Plan could result in a significant impact in regards to exposing future residents to nuisances associated with agricultural operations or exposing farming activities to nuisances associated with urban uses.

In regards to pest management from agricultural land uses, the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's Office is primarily concerned with the possible transport of pest and disease into agricultural operations adjacent to urban development through physical transport by vehicular traffic, not through trespass incidents from pedestrians or animals of residential developments.¹⁵ If development of newly designated urbanized land occurs adjacent to agricultural areas, access to these newly designated urbanized land uses will be introduced, which could cause the transportation and introduction of pest and disease onto the agriculturally active land, causing a potentially significant impact. The Los Angeles County Agricultural Commissioner is authorized to implement or cooperate in management or mitigation programs to be conducted against such plant, environmental, or nuisance pests as can be controlled in an economically, ecologically, and biologically sound manner to protect agriculture. Since the County's Planning Area does not contain any policies that will reduce the impacts associated with possible exposure of future residents and employees to agricultural pests and diseases; impacts would be potentially significant.

The Area Plan does not include any policies that would

- reduce the impacts associated with possible exposure of future residents to nuisances associated with agricultural operations,
- reduce the impacts of exposure from currently established farms to nuisances associated with adjacent urban uses, or
- reduce exposure to future residents of agricultural pests and diseases.

¹⁵ Personal Communication with Ms. Rita Graham, Agricultural Planner, Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, Oct. 23, 2007.

However, with implementation of mitigation measure **MM 3.5-1**, these impacts would be reduced to a less than significant level.

Proposed Policies

The proposed Area Plan does not include any policies that address possible exposure of (1) future residents to nuisances associated with agricultural operations, or (2) currently established farms to nuisances associated with adjacent urban uses.

Effectiveness of Policies

The proposed Area Plan does not contain any policies that would reduce the exposure of future residents to nuisances associated with agricultural operations or expose farms to nuisances exposed from urban uses. Therefore, these potential impacts would continue to be significant. However, implementation of mitigation measure **MM 3.5-1** would reduce these impacts to a less than significant level.

Mitigation Framework

Impacts on agricultural land use within the County's Planning Area would be significant because the Land Use Policy Map is inconsistent with the Area Plan's policies.

The following mitigation measure would reduce potential impacts associated with (1) exposing future residents to nuisances associated with agricultural operations, or (2) exposing farms to nuisances associated with urban uses to less than significant.

- 3.5-1** The County of Los Angeles shall implement a Right-to-Farm Ordinance in order to protect existing agricultural operations from future residents that could produce nuisances and to inform new residents of existing agricultural operations within the County's Planning Area that could produce nuisances such as excess noise, odor, vector control problems, vermin infestation, and pesticide overspray with implementation of the proposed Area Plan.

Significance of Impact with Mitigation Framework

Since the Important Farmlands that are designated under the 2004–2006 FMMP mapping cycle would be conserved through the policies provided above, impacts would be less than significant. The Important Farmland that is designated under the 2004–2006 FMMP mapping cycle have been approved and are in

the process of being urbanized. Therefore, the CDC, upon completion of their 2006–2008 FMMP mapping cycle, shall show that these areas have been declassified as Important Farmland designations.

With the implementation of the above mitigation measure, agricultural resources nuisance impacts would be less than significant.