5.2 - Agricultural Resources

5.2.1 - Introduction

This section addresses potential environmental impacts to agricultural resources resulting from implementation of the proposed General Plan and Development Code Update. Information obtained from the City of Fresno has been used to determine the existing agricultural setting within the Planning Area. Information on types of crops grown and impact on crops as well as impacts on the value of the soils are economic effects and are not addressed because economic effects are not required to be treated as significant environmental effects (CEQA Guidelines Section 15131). In addition, the proposed General Plan and Development Code Update would result in the loss of farmland and the City acknowledges that there are no feasible measures to replace the loss of farmland.

5.2.2 - Environmental Setting

Study Area for Project Impacts

The study area for project impacts regarding agricultural resources is the Planning Area because potential development under the General Plan and Development Code Update is limited to areas within the Planning Area.

Study Area for Cumulative Impacts

The study area for the analysis of cumulative agricultural resources impacts is the area surrounding the Planning Area including land under the jurisdiction of the County of Fresno, City of Clovis, and County of Madera.

Regional Setting

Central California is one of the world’s premier growing regions. The Fresno region is characterized as a mature agricultural area, with a well-defined pattern of farming activities. Much of the land under agricultural operations is devoted to relatively stable crops such as orchards and vineyards. The primary crops within Fresno and Madera Counties include fruits and nuts, livestock and poultry, vegetable crops, and field crops.

Local Setting

Based on existing farmland data received from the Fresno County Assessor’s Office Land Use Codes that were provided by City staff, there is a total of approximately 11,714 acres that have agricultural operations within the Planning Area. The primary agricultural uses are located outside the existing City limit. The southeast portion of the Planning Area, referenced in the General Plan as the Southeast Development Area, or SEDA, contains approximately 50 percent of the existing farming in the Planning Area.
5.2.3 - Regulatory Setting

Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA)

The FPPA was designed to minimize the impact Federal programs have on the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. This act assures that to the extent possible federal programs are administered to be compatible with state, local units of government, and private programs and policies to protect farmland. Federal agencies are required to develop and review their policies and procedures to implement the FPPA every two years. This act does not authorize the Federal Government to regulate the use of private or nonfederal land or, in any way, affect the property rights of owners. For the purposes of the act, farmland includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and land of statewide or local importance. Farmland subject to FPPA requirements does not have to be currently used for cropland. It can be forest land, pastureland, cropland, or other land, but not water or urban built-up land (NRCS, 2012).

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The California Department of Conservation established the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) in 1982. The FMMP is a non-regulatory program and provides a consistent and impartial analysis of agricultural land use and land use changes throughout California. The FMMP produces maps and statistical data used for analyzing impacts on California’s agricultural resources. Agricultural land is rated according to soil quality and irrigation status. The best quality land is called Prime Farmland with additional categories, including Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance. The maps are updated every two years with the use of aerial photographs, a computer mapping system, public review, and field reconnaissance. The farmland mapping categories that are used for the County of Fresno are shown below in Table 5.2-1:

Table 5.2-1: Description of Farmland Classifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farmland Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Farmland (P)</td>
<td>Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland of Statewide Importance (S)</td>
<td>Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Farmland (U)</td>
<td>Farmland 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. Land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland of Local Importance (L)</td>
<td>Land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Fresno County, this category is</td>
<td>defined as all farmable lands within Fresno County that do not meet the definitions of Prime, Statewide, or Unique. This includes land that is or has been used for irrigated pasture, dry-land farming, confined livestock and dairy, poultry facilities, aquaculture and grazing land.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing (G)</td>
<td>Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock. This category was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen’s Association, University of California Cooperative Extension, and other groups interested in the extent of grazing activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban &amp; Built-up Land (D)</td>
<td>Land occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately 6 structures to a 10-acre parcel. This land is used for residential, industrial, commercial, construction, institutional, public administration, railroad and other transportation yards, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, water control structures, and other developed purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (X)</td>
<td>Land not included in any other mapping category. Common examples include low density rural developments; brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing; confined livestock, poultry or aquaculture facilities; strip mines, borrow pits; and water bodies smaller than forty acres. Vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is mapped as Other Land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water (W)</td>
<td>Perennial water bodies with an extent of at least 40 acres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional Designation: Land Committed</td>
<td>This category was developed in cooperation with local government planning departments and county boards of supervisors during the public workshop phase of the FMMP’s development in 1982.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Nonagricultural Use</td>
<td>Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use is defined as existing farmland, grazing land, and vacant areas, which have a permanent commitment for development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Based on the farmland mapping categories identified above, Table 5.2-2 depicts the acreages of each category within the Planning Area and Exhibit 5.2-1 illustrates the location of each farmland category.

Table 5.2-2: Farmland Designations within the Planning Area per the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Acreage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Farmland</td>
<td>9,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland of Statewide Importance</td>
<td>2,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Farmland</td>
<td>2,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland of Local Importance</td>
<td>9,070</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Designation vs. Acreage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Acreage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban/Developed</td>
<td>70,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Residential(^1)</td>
<td>6,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Vegetation</td>
<td>1,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confined Animal Agriculture</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>2,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Agricultural/ Rural Commercial</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total(^2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>106,027</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Residential areas of 1 to 5 structures per 10 acres ("ranchettes") as defined by the FMMP

\(^2\) Source: California Department of Conservation, Important Farmland Mapping, 2010

As shown in Table 5.2-2, the Planning Area includes approximately 10,149 acres of Prime Farmland, approximately 2,559 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and approximately 3,195 acres of Unique Farmland. The Planning Area includes approximately 15,903 acres of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland. This represents approximately 16 percent of the Planning Area.

### Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act)

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act) 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 uses. In return, the landowners receive property tax assessments based on farming and open space uses, as opposed to full market value, thus resulting in a lower tax burden. These contracts are for 10 years and automatically renew the following year and roll into the next year unless the owner files a notice of non-renewal.

The purpose of the Williamson Act is to preserve agricultural and open space lands by discouraging premature and unnecessary conversion to urban uses. The minimum preserve size is 100 acres, and minimum standard contract size for Fresno County is 20 acres on Prime Farmland and 40 acres on non-prime within a preserve. The Williamson Act has a minimum contract size of 10 acres. The landowner can petition to cancel a contract, although the presiding jurisdiction must make a finding based on substantial evidence that supports the cancellation of the contract. Upon approval, the landowner must pay a fee equal to 12.5 percent of the unrestricted, current fair market valuation of the property.
Exhibit 5.2-1
Farmland Classifications

Source: City of Fresno, CA Important Farmland Mapping, 2010
As shown in Table 5.2-3, the Planning Area contains approximately 748 acres of prime agricultural land that are under a Williamson Act Contract as well approximately 824 acres of non-prime agricultural land (i.e., Statewide Importance, Local Importance, or Unique). Exhibit 5.2-2 illustrates the locations of the Williamson Act Contract land. None of the land under Williamson Act Contract as of January 2014 has been issued a notice of non-renewal based on requests of the property owners. All non-renewal requests within the Planning Area have now resulted in termination of the contract.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farmland Designation of Williamson Act Contract</th>
<th>Acreage$^1$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Farmland</td>
<td>748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland of Statewide Importance</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Farmland</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland of Local Importance</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Lands</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,615</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$ Acreage was obtained from the Fresno County Williamson Act Contracts. Source: FirstCarbon Solutions 2014.

Local Policies

The City of Fresno has objective and policies related to agricultural resources within the City of Fresno 2025 General Plan. These include the following:

G-5 Objective: While recognizing that the County of Fresno retains the primary responsibility for agricultural land use policies and the protection and advancement of farming operations, the City of Fresno will support efforts to preserve agricultural land outside of the area planned for urbanization and outside of the city's public service delivery capacity by being responsible in its land use plans, public service delivery plans, and development policies.

G-5-a. Policy: Establish a cooperative research and planning program with the County of Fresno, City of Clovis, and other public agencies to conserve agricultural - land resources.

G-5-b. Policy: Plan for the location and intensity of urban development in a manner that efficiently utilizes land area located within the planned urban boundary, including the North and Southeast Growth Areas, while promoting compatibility with agricultural uses located outside of the planned urban area.

G-5-c. Policy: The City of Fresno shall encourage project development proposals that result in the infilling of the existing urban area.
G-5-d. Policy: New urban development should be compact within the constraints of service capability to conserve land resources and forestall conversion of agricultural land by preventing urban sprawl.

G-5-e. Policy: Amend the urban referral and "holding zone" provisions of the 1983 City of Fresno/City of Clovis/Fresno County Joint Resolution on Metropolitan Planning, and negotiate a memorandum of understanding with these adjoining jurisdictions to prevent further development of rural residential development as well as all forms of urban development not consistent with the 2025 General Plan strategies for compact contiguous development within the city general plan boundaries.

G-5-f. Policy: Oppose lot splits and development proposals in unincorporated areas within and outside the city general plan boundary when these proposals would do any of the following:

- make it difficult or infeasible to implement the general plan.
- contribute to the premature conversion of agricultural, open space, or grazing lands; or constitute a detriment to the management of resources and/or facilities important to the metropolitan area (such as, air quality, water quantity and quality, traffic circulation, and riparian habitat).

G-5-g. Policy: In the San Joaquin River bottom, accommodate agricultural uses that do not stimulate unplanned growth or conversion of designated open space land to urban uses.

5.2.4 - Thresholds of Significance

CEQA Thresholds

In accordance with CEQA, the effects of a project are evaluated to determine if they will result in significant adverse impact on the environment. The criteria used to determine the significance of an impact to agricultural resources are based on the Environmental Checklist in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines and identified below. Accordingly, agricultural resources impacts resulting from the proposed project are considered significant if the project would:

a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use? (See Convert Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use, Impact AG-1)

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract? (See Conflict with Existing Zoning or Williamson Act Contract, Impact AG-2)

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))? (See Section 7.2.1, Forestry Resources)
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use? (See Section 7.2.1, Forestry Resources)

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 or conversion of forest land to non-forest use? (See Conversion to Non-Agricultural or Non-Forest Use, Impact AG-3)

5.2.5 - Impact Analysis, Mitigation Measures, and Level of Significance After Mitigation

Convert Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use

| Impact AG-1 | The project would convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use. |

**Project Specific Impact Analysis**

The Planning Area includes locations that have been designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance through the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Department of Conservation. The proposed General Plan Update includes a variety of land uses; however, there are no land uses that only allow agricultural uses. One land use designation within the General Plan and Development Code Update allows agricultural uses; however, there are other uses that are allowed within the same designation. This designation is “Buffer” and is intended to separate urban uses from agricultural uses. This use is planned within an approximately one-quarter mile wide buffer designated along the eastern Planning Area boundary in the Southeast Development Area. This area encompasses approximately 736 acres. In addition to agricultural uses, there are other general categories of land uses allowed within the Buffer designation including environmental, habitat, water conveyance, retention and recharge, and preservation and preparation of gravel resources for beneficial uses related to permanent water resource facilities. Therefore, for the purpose of this analysis, as a worst-case assumption, the General Plan Update would not conserve agricultural resources within the Planning Area.

Based on the FMMP, there are approximately 9,550 acres of Prime Farmland, approximately 2,911 acres of Unique Farmland, and approximately 2,355 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance for a total of approximately 14,816 acres within the Planning Area. Although there may be land this is designated as farmland in the FMMP, existing agricultural operations are not necessarily occurring on all of the designated land. In addition, there may be some agricultural operations that occur within the Planning Area that are not designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Based on existing farmland data received from the Fresno County Assessor’s Office Land Use Codes that was provided by City staff, there is a total of approximately 11,714 acres that have agricultural operations.

With the implementation of the General Plan and Development Code Update, the approximately 15,903 acres of FMMP-designated farmland and approximately 11,714 acres of existing farmland are
anticipated to be converted to uses other than agriculture. This conversion is a significant impact on agricultural resources.

Through the previous approval of the City of Fresno 2025 General Plan in 2002, a majority of the approximately 15,903 acres of farmland were approved to be converted to non-agricultural uses. The City of Fresno 2025 General Plan currently has approximately 82 acres of land that is designated as open space-agriculture. Although it appears that the City would need to approve the conversion of an additional 82 acres of City-designated agricultural land, the City will consider the approval of the conversion of approximately 15,903 acres of FMMP-designated farmland and approximately 11,714 acres of existing farmland to non-farmland uses. This conversion of agricultural uses is considered a significant impact.

To reduce potential project-specific impacts on agricultural uses, the general Plan Update includes the following policy.

**Policy RC-9-b.** Land Outside SOI. Express opposition to residential and commercial development proposals in unincorporated areas (excluding County Islands) within or adjacent to the Planning Area when these proposals would do any of the following:

- Make it difficult or infeasible to implement the General Plan;
- Contribute to the premature conversion of agricultural, open space, or grazing lands; or
- Constitute a detriment to the management of resources and/or facilities important to the Fresno Metropolitan Area (such as air quality, water quantity and quality, traffic circulation, and riparian habitat).

With the implementation of the above objective and policies, project impacts on agricultural resources will remain significant.

**Cumulative Impact Analysis**

Future development in areas outside of the Planning Area such as the County of Fresno, City of Clovis, and County of Madera are anticipated to convert agricultural uses to non-agricultural uses. This future conversion would result in a significant cumulative impact. The implementation of the General Plan and Development Code Update will contribute to the conversion of agricultural uses to non-agricultural uses. Therefore, the proposed project’s contribution to impacts on agricultural resources is considered cumulatively significant. As a result, the project will result in a significant cumulative impact on agricultural resources.

To reduce potential cumulative impacts on agricultural uses, the General Plan Update includes the following objective and policies.

**Objective RC-9.** Preserve agricultural land outside of the area planned for urbanization under this General Plan.
Policy RC-9-a. Regional Cooperation. Work to establish a cooperative research and planning program with the Counties of Fresno and Madera, City of Clovis, and other public agencies to conserve agricultural land resources.

Policy RC-9-b. Land Outside SOI. Express opposition to residential and commercial development proposals in unincorporated areas (excluding County Islands) within or adjacent to the Planning Area when these proposals would do any of the following:

- Make it difficult or infeasible to implement the General Plan;
- Contribute to the premature conversion of agricultural, open space, or grazing lands; or
- Constitute a detriment to the management of resources and/or facilities important to the Fresno Metropolitan Area (such as air quality, water quantity and quality, traffic circulation, and riparian habitat).

Policy RC-8-c. Farmland Enrollment. Advocate for the enrollment of all prime farmland outside of the City's SOI in agricultural land conservation programs.

With the implementation of the above objective and policies, cumulative impacts on agricultural resources will remain significant.

Mitigation Measures

Project Specific
No feasible measures in addition to the above policy are available.

Cumulative
No feasible measures in addition to the above objective and policies are available.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Project Specific
Significant impact.

Cumulative
Significant impact.

Conflict with Existing Zoning or Williamson Act Contract

| Impact AG-2 | The project would conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract. |

Project Specific Impact Analysis

The Planning Area includes lands that are under a Williamson Act Contract for prime agricultural land as well as non-prime agricultural land. Currently, the majority of the Williamson Act Contract land is designated for non-agricultural land uses. There are approximately 82 acres that are currently designated for open space-agricultural uses under the existing City of Fresno 2025 General Plan.
These 82 acres are proposed with non-agricultural land uses under the proposed General Plan and Development Code Update. In addition to the 82 acres, the remaining land that is under a Williamson Act contract and within the Planning Area will continue to be designated for non-agricultural uses. Therefore, the implementation of the proposed General Plan and Development Code Update could conflict with existing Williamson Act Contracts because non-agricultural uses are allowed on the existing Contract land. As a result, the proposed project could result in a significant impact on existing Williamson Act Contract land.

In addition, the approximately 82 acres of agricultural land are designated for Open Space Conservation under the existing zoning ordinance. Agricultural uses are a permitted use in the Open Space Conservation zone. The proposed Development Code Update modifies the Open Space Conservation designation to Open Space where agricultural uses are no longer a permitted use. The existing agricultural uses can continue to operate as legal non-conforming land uses. However, the proposed revision to the zoning ordinance related to agricultural uses would result in a significant impact on existing zoning for agricultural uses.

To reduce potential project-specific impacts on agricultural zoning and Williamson Act Contracts, the General Plan Update includes Policy RC-9-b that will reduce the premature conversion of agricultural land within the Planning Area and outside the sphere-of-influence. Although this policy will reduce some impacts on agricultural zoning and Williamson Act contracts, impacts will remain significant.

**Cumulative Impact Analysis**

Future development in areas outside of the Planning Area such as the County of Fresno, City of Clovis, and County of Madera may conflict with existing agricultural zoning and Williamson Act Contracts. There are existing areas currently zoned for agriculture and under Williamson Act Contracts adjacent to and outside of the Planning Area. Since the proposed project could conflict with agricultural zoning and Williamson Act Contracts within the Planning Area, the proposed project’s contribution to impacts on agricultural zoning and Williamson Act Contracts is considered cumulatively significant. As a result, the project will result in a significant cumulative impact on land zoned for agriculture and under a Williamson Act Contract.

To reduce potential cumulative impacts on agricultural zoning and Williamson Act Contracts, the General Plan Update includes Objective RC-9 and Policies RC-9-a through RC-9-c that will reduce the premature conversion of agricultural land within the Planning Area and outside the sphere-of-influence and could reduce conflicts with agricultural zoning and Williamson Act Contracts. Although this objective and policies may reduce some impacts on agricultural zoning and Williamson Act contracts, the project’s contribution to cumulative impacts will remain significant.

**Mitigation Measures**

*Project Specific*

No feasible measures in addition to the above policy are available.

*Cumulative*

No feasible measures in addition to the above objective and policies are available.
Level of Significance After Mitigation

Project Specific
Significant impact.

Cumulative
Significant impact.

Conversion to Non-Agricultural or Non-Forest Use

Impact AG-3 The project would not involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

Project Specific Impact Analysis
As discussed in Impact AG-1, future development in accordance with the General Plan Update would result in the conversion of farmland to a non-agricultural use. Except for direct conversion, the implementation of project development would not result in other changes in the existing environment that would impact agricultural land outside of the Planning Area. In addition, the development in accordance with the General Plan Update would not impact forest land as discussed in Section 7.2.1 of this Draft Master EIR. Therefore, the project would result in no impact on farmland or forest land involving other changes in the existing environment.

Cumulative Impact Analysis
Future development in areas outside of the Planning Area such as the County of Fresno, City of Clovis, and County of Madera may involve other changes in the existing environment that could result in the conversion of farmland or forest land. However, since the proposed project would not result in impacts on farmland due to other changes in the existing environment, the proposed project would not contribute to potential cumulative impacts. Therefore, the proposed project would result in no cumulative impacts involving other changes in the existing environment that could result in the conversion of farmland or forest land.

Mitigation Measures

Project Specific
No mitigation measures are required.

Cumulative
No mitigation measures are required.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Project Specific
No impact.

Cumulative
No impact.