

## GENERAL PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Yolo Ag Futures Alliance

September 4, 2007

The Yolo Ag Futures Alliance (AFA) recommends including draft policies and implementation measures to support agricultural economic development efforts in the draft General Plan. We also suggest that the General Plan include a proposal to fund the implementation measures, since it appears that Yolo County has not yet started implementing some of the measures in the 2002 Agricultural Element. The AFA recommends the following implementation measures:

- Create an farmland mitigation bank in Yolo County;
- Develop farmland conservation zones or alternative planning areas to designate important farmland in Yolo County (these zones are different than agricultural districts); and
- Create a Farmland Prosperity Fund.

### Farmland Mitigation Bank

The General Plan should include the establishment of a farmland mitigation bank as an implementation measure of the policy AP-3 in the existing Agricultural Element, “Yolo County shall encourage acquisition of agricultural conservation easements by local, state, and federal agencies and private non-profit organizations to protect agriculture.” The implementation measure could read as follows:

AI-X: Yolo County shall establish a farmland mitigation bank to discourage the use of in-lieu fees for farmland mitigation and encourage coordinated farmland conservation.

The establishment of a farmland mitigation bank should eliminate the need to charge in-lieu fees for agricultural conservation easements related to farmland mitigation. In-lieu fees are the least acceptable form of mitigation because often the fees are not spent on easements in a timely manner. Unspent funds quickly lose their purchasing power. The establishment of a mitigation bank also will help to provide more direction to farmland conservation efforts, including the development of a strategic plan, which funding agencies often encourage or require as part of grant applications.

### Farmland Conservation Zones

The General Plan should include a new policy and an implementation measure to create farmland preservation zones in Yolo County. The AFA suggests the following policy:

AP-X: Yolo County shall direct funding to, focus ag land conservation efforts on, and create progressive policies to encourage agricultural viability for areas designated by the county as productive farmland.

AFA suggests the following implementation measures for this policy:

AI-X2: Yolo County shall identify farmland preservation zones, or planning areas used to designate the location of productive farmland. These zones shall include large tracts of contiguous agricultural land removed from urban areas and rural residential housing that interferes with agricultural production.

AI-X3: Yolo County shall develop a strategy to direct funding, focus agricultural land conservation efforts, and create progressive policies to encourage agricultural viability in farmland preservation zones.

Farmland preservation zones are important because resources to protect farmland and encourage agricultural economic viability are limited. Yolo County needs to focus local, state, and federal resources in areas that will result in the largest benefit to the Yolo County agricultural industry. While the quality of soils may be a factor in the creation of farmland preservation zones, other factors – such as distance from urban areas and rural residential housing, the amount of land available for farming, habitat value, and crop value (or other economic criteria) – are also important. The AFA understands that all parcels in Yolo County that are not zoned for development are zoned for agriculture. Simply zoning for agriculture is not enough; Yolo County needs to identify the most productive agricultural areas in Yolo County and direct resources to those areas.

Farmland preservation zones are not “agricultural districts” as currently discussed in the General Plan process. We understand that you are considering the creation of “agricultural districts” in the Capay Valley, Dunnigan Hills, and Clarksburg area and that you welcome ideas related to these agricultural districts. The AFA will comment on the agricultural districts when more information is available in the draft General Plan.

#### Farmland Prosperity Fund

The General Plan should include a policy to create a dedicated funding source for efforts to support agricultural economic development and a specific implementation measure to create a Farmland Prosperity Fund. The policy could read as follows:

AP-X2: Yolo County shall lead efforts to seek funding to support agricultural economic development efforts.

The implementation measure could read as follows:

AI-X4: Yolo County shall create a Farmland Prosperity Fund to minimize the impacts of development on agriculture and help sustain a productive, vibrant, thriving agricultural economy.

Each development project has a cumulative impact on farmland beyond the project footprint. The fewer acres in production, for example, the harder it is for remaining farmers to provide enough business to sustain local services and processing facilities. The

establishment of a Farmland Prosperity Fund would address the cumulative impact by strengthening the remaining agricultural industry and supporting a critical mass of producers and infrastructure necessary to sustain a productive, vibrant, and thriving agricultural economy. The Farmland Prosperity Fund could be used to support the following activities, for example:

- Seed money to develop local processing facilities;
- Agricultural economic development and outreach (e.g. convince small breweries and wineries to relocate or expand to Yolo County);
- Development of farm-sized biodiesel production equipment;
- Revolving fund (or micro-loans) for the development of small, high-value operations (e.g. goat dairy/creamery, slaughter/packing for small-scale pastured meat production);
- Assist farmer co-op groups with creation of small, high-value operations (assistance could include consulting services);
- Traffic mitigation to facilitate safe movement of agricultural equipment on county roads;
- Development of programs to attract new and retain existing innovative producers and processors who will pioneer new methods of agricultural production, sustainable practices, and marketing.