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County of Ventura
Agricultural/Urban Buffer Policy – Revised 7/19/06

The purpose of this policy is to protect the public health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Ventura County *and* protect the economic viability and long-term sustainability of the Ventura County agricultural industry.

New urban developments (and non-farming activities) should be required to lessen public and animal exposure to agricultural chemicals, dust, noise and odors *and* protect agricultural operations and land from vandalism, pilferage, trespassing and complaints against standard legal agricultural practices.

This Policy provides guidelines to prevent and/or mitigate conflicts that may arise at the agricultural/urban interface. It applies where urban structures or ongoing non-farming activities are permitted adjacent to land 1) in crop or orchard production; or 2) classified by the California Department of Conservation Important Farmland Inventory as Prime, Statewide Importance, Unique or Local Importance farmland. These guidelines apply to projects requiring discretionary approval by the county or a city where the proposed non-farming activity is abutting or on land zoned AE, OS or RA, and the farming activity is located outside a Sphere of Influence, as adopted by LAFCO. The Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee (APAC) or the Agricultural Commissioner may grant an exemption to these policies on a case-by-case basis, where physical factors prevent or alleviate the need for compliance.

Where applicable, urban developments or non-agricultural uses shall be conditioned to provide and maintain a 300-foot setback and chain-link fence on the non-agricultural property between the urban use and the agriculture, or a 150-foot buffer/setback if a vegetative screen as described below is used.

APPLYING THE POLICY TO NEW DEVELOPMENT

New dwellings, non-agricultural work sites and ongoing outdoor public activities potentially conflict with agricultural operations. A buffer/setback and fencing are therefore needed on these sites when they are developed adjacent to the qualifying agricultural land. *A 300-foot setback to new structures and sensitive uses is required on the non-agricultural property unless a vegetative screen is installed. With a vegetative screen the buffer/setback is a minimum of 150-feet.*

Fencing requirements:

A reinforced 8-foot chain link fence with top bar is required on applicable urban developments to deter pilferage and vandalism of crops. Placement is nearest the agricultural side. If the agricultural field has a fence, the requirement may be satisfied.

Minimum standards for vegetative screen (shelter belt):

- Two staggered rows of trees and shrubs characterized by evergreen foliage that extends from the base of the plant to the crown
- Trees and shrubs should be vigorous, drought tolerant and at least 6 feet in height at the time of installation
- Plants should have 50% to 75% porosity (i.e., approximately 50% to 75% of the plant is air space)
- Plant height should vary in order to capture drift within 4 feet of ground applications
- A mature height of 15 feet or more is required for trees

- To ensure adequate coverage, 2 staggered rows should be located 5 feet apart and consist of minimum 5 gallon plants at least 6 feet tall planted 10 feet on center
- Recommended plants include: Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), Sugarbush (*Rhus ovata*), Laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*) and Italian cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*)
- A long-term plan shall be in place for maintaining the vegetative shelter belt

The following uses are acceptable within 300 feet of agriculture:

- Parking lots and garages
- Landscaping/hardscape
- Storage sheds or open storage
- Greenhouse structures with venting away from the non-agricultural area
- Wooden or chain link fencing
- Some types of livestock such as range cattle or sheep (other livestock only as approved by APAC)
- Roads and drainage facilities
- Farmworker dwellings where notification between farmer and occupants can easily occur prior to spraying
- Low human-intensity uses as approved by APAC

The following uses are acceptable within 150 feet of agriculture with a vegetative screen (shelter belt):

- All uses acceptable within 300 feet
- Front yard setbacks
- Hiking, bike or bridle paths
- Single-use facilities for government, institutional or educational use where agreements and notification between parties can easily occur prior to spraying
- Farm and produce stands where notification between farmers and occupants can easily occur prior to spraying
- Agricultural Tourism in accordance with a Condition Use Permit (CUP)

APPLYING THE POLICY TO MODIFICATIONS OF EXISTING USES/ACTIVITIES

- All Policy guidelines apply where feasible

The following apply where existing structures do not allow a 300-foot or 150-foot setback:

- Installation of a reduced vegetative screen
- Reinforced 8-foot chain link fence (minimum requirement)
- Information exchange for agricultural spraying notification
- Posting of Right-to-Farm Ordinance at the site of existing uses/activities
- Agreement to modify existing cooperative practices, if needed

The following apply where a school is located directly within 300 feet of agriculture:

- All K-12 school construction within 300 feet of agriculture requires a public meeting by APAC – and is strongly discouraged within ¼-mile of agriculture
- When a school is located directly within 300 feet of agriculture, the recommendations in *Farming Near Schools, A Community Guide for Protecting Children* (available from the Agricultural Commissioner's Office or www.agfuturesalliance.net) shall be followed by both the farmer and the school

These Guidelines were developed in part from data from *Spray Drift Task Force (1997)*, established in response to EPA spray drift data requirements.