



PREVENTING SPRAWL

FARMERS AND ENVIRONMENTALISTS WORKING TOGETHER

SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA - FEBRUARY 2004
GREENBELT ALLIANCE & SONOMA COUNTY FARM BUREAU



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The photos in this report have been
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Greenbelt Alliance

Santa Rosa Downtown Market

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WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION SONOMA COUNTY FOR ITS
SUPPORT OF THIS PROJECT AND ITS ROLE AS FISCAL SPONSOR.



THIS PROJECT WAS FUNDED BY A GRANT FROM THE JAMES IRVINE FOUNDATION.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The people of Sonoma County have done an exceptional job of recognizing the threat of sprawl development and taking early and continuous policy action to face the challenges that come with being one of the most desirable places to live and work in California. Over the past 30 years this effort has been controversial, resulting in periods of political upheaval. More recently, Sonoma County residents have become unified behind public policies to prevent sprawl development as a key step in preserving a vibrant economy and environment, and the quality of the County's communities.

In many ways, Sonoma County is a model of sound anti-sprawl land use policy. For 25 years the County General Plan has concentrated growth in existing urban communities along the Highway 101 corridor. This city-centered growth model has been largely successful in maintaining community separation, preserving agricultural and open space lands, and providing protection for a

changing, but still successful, agricultural economy. The continuing success of agriculture in the county is responsible for supporting a wide variety of jobs, sustaining an acclaimed historical tradition, and creating a sense of county identity and pride.

In 1990, county residents voted to create the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, which has used funds raised from a local sales tax to acquire or protect from development more than 58,000 acres of land. More recently, city leaders have also pursued a model of city-centered growth through voter enacted Urban Growth Boundaries around eight of the County's nine cities, all except Cloverdale. Few other places in the nation can match these achievements.

While these actions have delivered significant successes, some errors have been

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made and challenges clearly loom in the future. California's population will continue to grow in large numbers. Many people will move to Sonoma County to find a home and a job, and the children of those who live here now will also choose to stay in the communities where they grew up. To accommodate this growth in a way that creates new economic and social opportunities while protecting the county's agricultural heritage and open space, county leaders must adapt current policies to meet future needs.

In 2002, in a spirit of mutual interest, a group of environmentalists and farmers convened to seek a starting point, a common base of understanding for working together. This project – *Preventing Sprawl: Farmers and Environmentalists Working Together* – arose out of the contentious campaign over Measure I, the “Rural Heritage Initiative” that appeared on the November 2000 ballot. The “Rural Heritage Initiative,” which was defeated at the polls, would have required voter



approval for certain General Plan amendments to change agricultural and resources lands to other uses. Many relationships were strained as a result of that political engagement.

This project helped put the campaign arguments aside and revealed a mutual commitment to preventing sprawl development and conversion of agricultural and other open space lands to urban and suburban uses. It is also recognized that the success of this effort requires the presence of both farm families, whose day-to-day work is vital to Sonoma County's agricultural economy, and environmentalists who see the social and economic value of protecting agricultural and natural areas.

The focus of this project has been on preventing sprawl development, and there are many other land use issues not addressed in this report.

A central challenge facing Sonoma County is the same one facing California: how to accommodate the projected increase in growth and development in the decades ahead. By 2025, Sonoma County's population is expected to grow by 130,000 people, and by 2040, 295,000 new residents are expected in the county. New population requires new housing. By 2025 an additional 50,000 residential units will be required, and by 2040 a total of 115,000 new residential units are needed. Job growth will bring additional office and industrial development and the

increased population will require added consumer goods and services.

If developed at maximum permitted densities, the current supply of urban land in City and County General Plans will only absorb population and employment growth through the year 2025. This supply of urban land will be rapidly consumed if the vast majority of future development follows the current model of building large, single-family detached homes far from where people shop and work. Therefore, Sonoma County's cities must achieve the maximum density targets set out in their current general plans and zoning regulations. Over the next 35 years, expansion of urban growth boundaries and pressure to build on open space and agricultural land can only be avoided if cities encourage current development that allows more people to live and work in existing urban areas. This is accomplished by decreasing the maximum lot size for single-family homes or increasing the amount of housing in city centers (by building three to four story buildings instead of one to two story buildings).

To accommodate future growth while maintaining a vital agricultural industry and protecting open space, current land use policies that effectively prevent sprawl must be supplemented by new efforts. Over the past year, leading farmers and environmentalists in Sonoma County reached agreement on four immediate actions while agreeing to

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ONE FACING CALIFORNIA: HOW TO
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AHEAD.*

explore further other land use policies and options. The following recommendations constitute essential first steps to address the challenges of future growth and development:

MAINTAIN A STRONG COUNTY GENERAL PLAN. The Sonoma County General Plan has been an effective tool in managing growth and resources. The Board of Supervisors should ensure that the fundamental policies of city-centered growth and preservation of agricultural lands, open space and community separation are carried forward undisturbed in the update now underway.

SUPPORT POLICIES THAT ACHIEVE HIGHER DENSITIES WITHIN EXISTING URBAN BOUNDARIES. The efficient use of land within existing urban boundaries requires that new development accommodate many more people per acre than past patterns of development. Cities will have to grow up, not out, by accommodating more people within downtown areas and along transit corridors.

ENCOURAGE CLOVERDALE TO ADOPT AN URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY.

Voter enacted urban growth boundaries are effective tools for preventing sprawl. Cloverdale is the only city in Sonoma County without an Urban Growth Boundary. This matter should be addressed by the residents and elected officials of Cloverdale and an Urban Growth Boundary should be defined and enacted.

EXTEND FUNDING FOR THE SONOMA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT.

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District was created by voter action in 1990. The District and its one-quarter cent sales tax funding source expire in April 2011. The District has been an invaluable tool in the fight against sprawl. Re-authorization of the District and its funding source should occur prior to 2011.

While these are not the only tools available for meeting Sonoma County's future land use needs and goals (several other policy options that merit additional consideration are detailed in Chapter 4 of this report), the farmers and environmentalists who oversaw the preparation of this report firmly believe that pursuing these four steps will greatly contribute to maintaining Sonoma County's agricultural heritage, unique communities, and natural splendor for years to come.



CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF LAND USE MANAGEMENT AND AGRICULTURE IN SONOMA COUNTY



Sonoma County is a place of breathtaking beauty with abundant natural resources and a rich cultural history. For thousands of years, small bands of native peoples inhabited the one million acres that now comprise Sonoma County, harvesting fish from the rivers and marshlands, hunting deer and elk on the fertile pastures, and drawing inspiration from the towering forests. The landscape changed in the 19th century with the arrival of Mexican missionaries, Russian explorers, and later, American settlers. By the start of the 20th century, Sonoma County consisted of hundreds of farms, dozens of lumber mills, and a handful of small towns extending from the Pacific Ocean to the northern tip of San Pablo Bay.

The first significant wave of development rolled into Sonoma County after the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937. The bridge not only provided a fast

and efficient way to transport agricultural products to the port and markets of San Francisco, it also facilitated an increase in tourism and settlement. Following World War II, Sonoma County's population grew rapidly thanks to an expanding economy, federal and state investment in highways and roads, and the construction of affordable "tract" housing in both incorporated and unincorporated areas of the county.

In the 1950s, Sonoma County developed a diversified economic base that included agriculture, regional financial services, light manufacturing, tourism, and construction-related services. Abundant and affordable housing met the demands of the growing regional job market, and new residents spurred growth in the retail, business, and government sectors. As the Bay Area grew more prosperous and populated, a new market emerged for country estates in rural Sonoma County.

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At that time, subdividing rural land required little more than surveying boundaries and filling out a new parcel map. "Four-by-fouring," in which developers created four-parcel subdivisions in rapid succession, without needing roads or proof of available water or on-site waste disposal capacity, grew popular.

By the mid-1960s the county's communities began to experience the negative repercussions of rapid, poorly planned growth. Schools became overcrowded and started "double sessions". Traffic congestion on Highway 101 steadily increased. Major water and sewer projects were needed to keep pace with new development. The public revenues generated by new development and economic activity were not keeping pace with the increasing costs of providing critical public services.

HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Increasing public concerns about the environment and public health during the 1960s and 1970s also affected Sonoma County. County residents defeated a proposed nuclear power plant on the coast at Bodega Head and successfully preserved large portions of the Sonoma Coast as state parks. In addition, growing public concern sparked a broad federal and state legislative agenda of environmental protection, resulting in the National Environmental Policy Act, the California Environmental Quality Act,

BY THE MID-1960S THE COUNTY'S COMMUNITIES BEGAN TO EXPERIENCE THE NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS OF RAPID, POORLY PLANNED GROWTH.

and reforms to California planning law. These new laws and reforms intended to balance the development process with the public demand for better protection of the natural environment.

Sonoma County's city and county governments responded to the rise of environmentalism and environmental regulations by creating new land use policies including zoning ordinances, resource management ordinances, subdivision controls, building controls, and environmental impact reports. In 1972, the City of Petaluma adopted one of the nation's first explicit growth management mea-



asures (an annual “cap” on new residential construction) that, although vigorously challenged by the development industry, were ultimately upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1978, Sonoma County released its first General Plan, which established policies to guide growth into cities and away from agricultural and natural resource areas.

Sonoma County’s progress toward the orderly management of growth was dealt a serious blow, however, with the adoption of Proposition 13 in 1978. Proposition 13 rolled back property taxes and capped their annual increase. While many homeowners and businesses benefited from Proposition 13, local governments experienced significant losses of revenue needed for basic services like schools, roads, and public safety. Consequently, sales tax became the primary source of revenue, touching off competition between cities and counties for new retail development, leading to the overdevelopment of retail space.

IN THE 1990S, PUBLIC CONCERN OVER RAPID URBANIZATION AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AND OPEN SPACE IN SONOMA COUNTY LED TO SEVERAL VOTER INITIATIVES.

In the 1990s, public concern over rapid urbanization and the displacement of agricultural land and open space in Sonoma County led to several voter initiatives. First, county residents voted to tax themselves to create the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, which purchases land or acquires a property’s development rights. Second, eight of Sonoma County’s nine cities (all except Cloverdale) adopted voter-approved Urban Growth Boundaries, which delineate urban areas from rural areas. In addition, increasing traffic congestion,



particularly on Highway 101, led to considerable debate over the relative merits of highway improvements and rail transit; but notably, proposed transportation bond measures have failed at the ballot box.

A comprehensive update of Sonoma County's General Plan is now underway. The new General Plan is expected to reaffirm the policies of city-centered growth and agricultural land protection. Nevertheless, because Sonoma County remains a highly desirable place to live and work, population growth and the demand for housing and urban development is projected to continue. This growth may challenge the ability of the county to sustain its land use policies – placing at risk the natural landscape and rural lifestyle that its residents desire and upon which its agricultural industry depends.

AGRICULTURAL HISTORY

The history of Sonoma County's settlement and land use is inextricably tied to

*GROWTH MAY CHALLENGE THE
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agriculture. Agriculture has been a mainstay of the county's economy since the 1850s and has had to remain responsive to market and policy conditions in order to stay viable. From vineyards to hops to apples and prunes, to dairy products and back to vineyards, the forms of agriculture in the county have cycled in and out of dominance over time.

Agriculture in Sonoma County began after 1823, when the Mexican government that ruled California established a mission in the present town of Sonoma. Wheat, apples, pears, cherries, and prunes were grown in the area using seed originally provided by Russian settlers from Fort Ross. The Mexican missionaries introduced olives and grapes to the region. After the Gold Rush, American farmers





expanded the acreage and variety of crops, transforming Sonoma County into an agricultural mecca. Sonoma's agricultural history also includes the horticulturist Luther Burbank, who between 1885 and 1926 introduced more than 800 varieties of plants through breeding experiments.

By the end of World War I, Petaluma began promoting itself as "The World's Egg Basket," boasting more hatcheries and egg farms than anywhere else in the world. At its peak, Petaluma shipped 30 million eggs per year to San Francisco. Gravenstein apples also reached their zenith in the 1920s with Sonoma orchards encompassing 27,000 acres of apples during that decade. By 1920, Sonoma County had surpassed Los Angeles with 22,000 productive acres of grapes and 256 wineries. The advent of Prohibition in 1920 dealt a severe, albeit temporary, blow to wine production in Sonoma County.

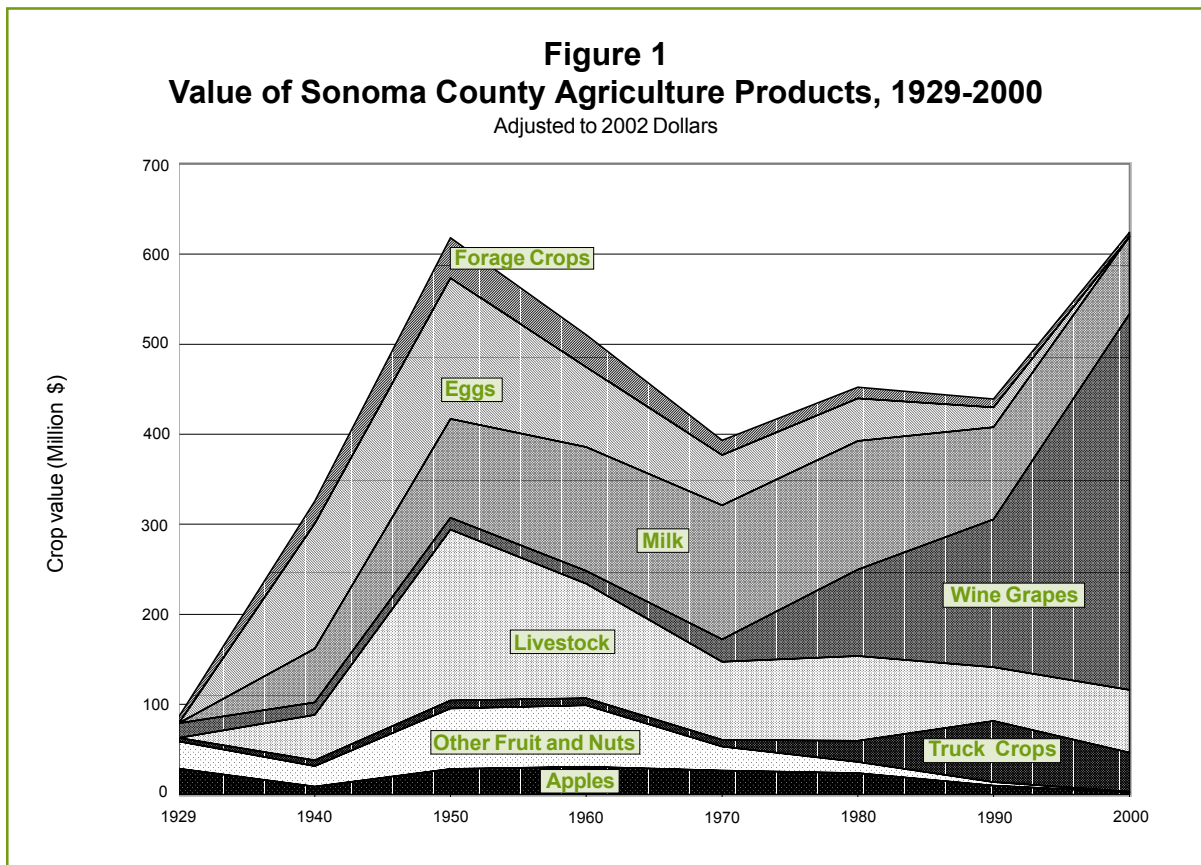
In the 1940s and 1950s, Sonoma County's apples, prunes, poultry, and eggs remained in high demand. Dairy farms grew in economic importance, and re-

mained strong until the 1980s, when competition from other locations as well as environmental restrictions made business increasingly difficult. Gravenstein apples, an early season variety, began to falter in the 1950s and 1960s as refrigerated storage allowed other apple producing areas, such as the Pacific Northwest, to transport apples to grocery stores year round. Prune production remained strong into the 1960s, when Sonoma County's market dominance was overtaken by the Sacramento Valley's lower production costs.

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Production of Sonoma County wines began to increase following the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 and after World War II to meet the increased demand from Europe, where many of the vineyards had been destroyed. The acreage of grapes continued to increase through the 1960s and 1970s, and in 1980, grapes overtook hay and grain as the largest crop in terms of acreage in Sonoma County. In 1986, grapes overtook dairy products as the county's top grossing crop. Today, Sonoma County is renowned worldwide for its high quality wines, produced by about 200 wineries operating over 60,000 acres of vineyards.

The history of agriculture in Sonoma County is characterized by constant change in response to regional, national, and international trends and competition. The overall production value of Sonoma County's agriculture has reached record highs, mainly due to the growth of the wine industry (See Figure 1). Sonoma County's farmers have also carved out a niche in specialty foods, such as organically grown produce. Nonetheless, Sonoma County's agricultural industry remains vulnerable to development pressures as well as market forces including competition from other agricultural regions.



CHAPTER 2

SONOMA COUNTY IN 2004



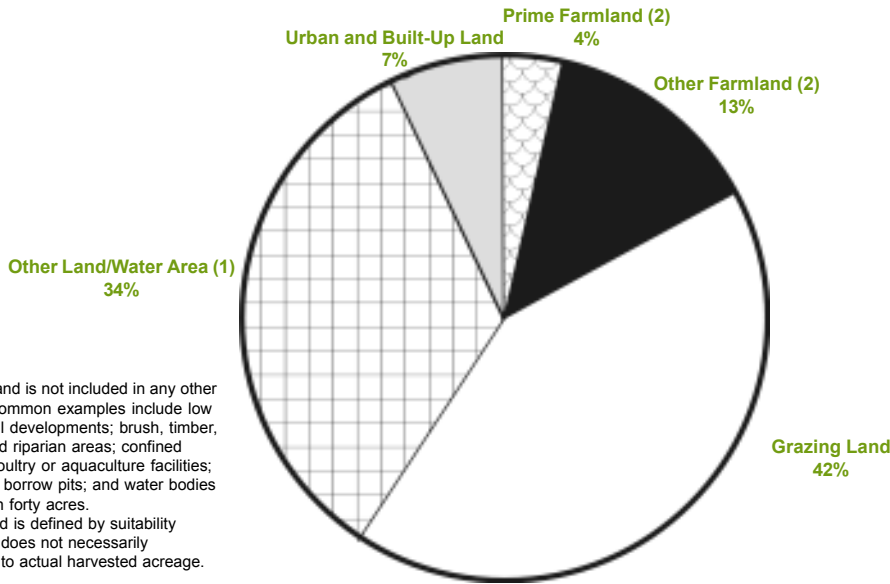
During the last fifty years, Sonoma County has successfully protected extensive agricultural areas and preserved beautiful natural landscapes while accommodating a significant growth in population. Agriculture, open space, and development have been able to co-exist thanks to the foresight of county leaders who created land use policies that allow growth but also ensure a high quality of life for county residents. This chapter examines current land uses, economic and demographic conditions, and government policies that have shaped the county's landscape. By understanding current conditions, we will be better equipped to face the challenges of the future.

LAND USES

The California Department of Conservation has calculated that Sonoma County covers about 1,025,000 acres and includes a diverse array of land uses. The county contains forests, scrubland, pastures, vineyards, orchards, wetlands, and urban development (**See Map 1**). Roughly seven percent of the county is urbanized, and the rural portions include a broad range of farming types and natural resource areas, in addition to more dispersed rural home sites (**See Map 2**). The county's parcel sizes vary significantly. Smaller rural parcels are clustered around the cities and the county's unincorporated communities. Larger parcels are located in more remote locations of the northwest, northeast, and coastal areas (**See Map 3**). The county's principal land uses are described below (**See Figure 2**).

*DURING THE LAST FIFTY YEARS,
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SUCCESSFULLY PROTECTED
EXTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL AREAS
AND PRESERVED BEAUTIFUL
NATURAL LANDSCAPES WHILE
ACCOMMODATING A SIGNIFICANT
GROWTH IN POPULATION.*

**Figure 2
Sonoma County Land Uses**



(1) Other Land is not included in any other category. Common examples include low density rural developments; brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas; confined livestock, poultry or aquaculture facilities; strip mines, borrow pits; and water bodies smaller than forty acres.
 (2) Farmland is defined by suitability criteria and does not necessarily correspond to actual harvested acreage.

Source: Farmland classification data from California Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 2000.

Urbanized Land – Seven percent of the county’s land area (70,800 acres) is urbanized, defined as land with more than one housing unit for every 1.5 acres. The majority of the urbanized area (45,000 acres) is within the spheres of influence of the county’s nine cities. Urbanized development is mostly residential, but also includes infrastructure (roads, schools, and parks). The county’s 14 unincorporated communities and the Windsor Airport Business Park cover the remaining urbanized land (25,800 acres). Five percent (3,300 acres) of the total urbanized area is developed for industrial and commercial use.

Agricultural Land – Fifty-nine percent of the county’s land (606,500 acres) is dedicated to agriculture. Of this total, grazing

land covers 430,000 acres, and farmland covers 175,000 acres. Thirty seven thousand acres are prime farmland (defined as land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops), much of which is in close proximity to the cities. Sixty thousand acres are covered with wine grapes. One hundred sixty thousand acres are in Williamson Act contracts, which offer a



property tax reduction for owners who agree to keep their land in agricultural use for 10 or 20 years.

Other Land/ Water – The remaining non-agricultural areas of the county, about 34 percent, are primarily rural residential development (at densities below one housing unit per 1.5 acres), wetlands, brush and timberlands unsuitable for grazing, and water bodies.

Publicly Owned and/ or Permanently Protected Lands – These lands, permanently protected from urban development, are dispersed throughout all the above land uses and make up 15 percent of the county’s land (150,900 acres). Most of this land was acquired in the last decade; in 1960 less 20,000 acres were permanently protected. The major land holders are: Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (56,650 acres protected with conservation easements; 2,250 owned in fee title), the California State Parks and Recreation Department (37,000 acres), Federal Army Corps of Engineers (17,600 acres surrounding Lake Sonoma), the California Department of Fish and Game (14,000 acres), Sonoma Land Trust (13,000 acres), Bureau of Land Management (7,000 acres), and the County Regional Parks Department (4,300 acres).

Natural Resource Lands – Important natural resource areas are dispersed throughout all the above land uses in the county: along the coast, in the vast northwestern area of the county, along its

eastern edge, and in the Santa Rosa plain. Resource categories include coast range forests, grasslands, coastal areas, riparian corridors, and wetlands, all of which support diverse ecological communities. Oak woodlands cover approximately 20 percent of the county’s land area.

The Land Use Element of the Sonoma County General Plan designates portions of the county’s 1,025,000 acres as follows: Resources and Rural Development (RRD) 492,695 acres (48% of total acreage in the county), Land Extensive Agriculture (LEA) 186,490 acres (18% of total acreage), Land Intensive Agriculture (LIA) 74,260 acres (7% of total acreage), Diverse Agriculture (DA) 68,762 acres (7% of total acreage). These four categories account for 80% of Sonoma County’s total land area . In addition, Rural Residential (RR) covers 75,900 acres (7% of total).



ECONOMY, POPULATION AND HOUSING

The number of people and housing units in Sonoma County has more than doubled in the last 30 years. During the same time period, the number of jobs has more than doubled, the wine industry has come to dominate the county's agriculture, tourism has boomed, and the high-tech sector has arrived. Housing prices in the cities have more than doubled and the majority of households can no longer afford the average priced home. Each of these forces - the local economy, population and the housing market - has significantly shaped local land use trends, as discussed below.

ECONOMY

At the heart of every economy lies a set of key industries that drive employment, income, and wealth. In Sonoma County, the three largest industries - the wine industry, the tourism industry, and the high-technology/telecommunications sector - together provide over 20 percent of the county's jobs (See Table 1). Many

smaller, local-serving industries, including consumer services, health services, government, and construction, provide well over 50 percent of the county's employment (See Table 2). The relatively high rates of growth in the key industries, notwithstanding the recent high-tech slow-down, imply strong economic growth in the county in coming years. Sonoma County's key industries are described below.

Agricultural Production, Processing and Support Services – Agricultural production has played a prominent role in the local economy for over 150 years. Agricultural production alone provides over 10,000 jobs, accounting for about 5 percent of total county employment. This production generates employment well beyond these numbers, however, through its direct demand for and support of food processing businesses, agricultural support services, and tourism. The wine industry, for example, which includes agricultural production (grape growing), support (transportation and storage), and processing (wine production), provides over 10,500 jobs.

**Table 1
Sonoma County Key Industry Jobs**

Industry Sector	Jobs		Share of Total		Growth 1991-2000	% Growth 1991-2000
	1991	2000	1991	2000		
High-Tech/ Telecom	7,243	12,587	5%	7%	5,344	74%
Tourism	13,237	17,013	9%	9%	3,776	29%
Wine	<u>5,749</u>	<u>10,604</u>	<u>4%</u>	<u>5%</u>	<u>4,855</u>	<u>84%</u>
Subtotal: Key Industries	26,229	40,204	18%	21%	13,975	53%
Total County	146,360	193,408	100%	100%	47,048	32%

Source: California Employment Development Department.

Table 2
Sonoma County Jobs in All Industry Sectors

Industry Sector	Jobs		Share of Total		Growth	% Growth
	1991	2000 (1)	1991	2000	1991-2000	1991-2000
Agriculture	7,230	10,145	5%	5%	2,915	40.3%
Business Services	21,291	28,513	15%	15%	7,222	33.9%
Construction	9,364	13,299	6%	7%	3,935	42.0%
Retail	38,737	49,591	26%	26%	10,854	28.0%
Health Services	9,682	14,742	7%	8%	5,060	52.3%
Manufacturing	20,639	30,012	14%	16%	9,373	45.4%
<i>Food Processing</i>	4,569	8,301	3%	4%	3,732	81.7%
Government	24,938	31,127	17%	16%	6,189	24.8%
Wholesale Trade	6,760	6,981	5%	4%	221	3.3%
Other	7,719	8,998	5%	5%	1,279	16.6%
Total County	146,360	193,408	100%	100%	47,048	32.10%

(1) 2000 data are for 3rd Quarter.

Source: California Employment Development Department.

Tourism – Tourism has long been a mainstay of Sonoma County’s economy. In the 1900s, the county’s rivers, mountains, forests, and beaches drew visitors from San Francisco. Today, about four million people visit Sonoma County annually to stay at bed and breakfasts, tour the wine country, shop in the county’s picturesque towns, or cruise the rugged coastline. Visitor spending now sustains over 15,000 jobs and generates nearly \$20 million annually in local tax revenues.

High Technology/Telecommunications – During the 1990s, employment in the county’s high-technology sector grew at more than twice the rate of other industries in the county, though this sector has lost a significant number of jobs in 2002 – 2003. Despite the current setbacks, many of the county’s top paying employers remain high-tech/telecommunications

firms. The factors that contributed to Sonoma County’s emergence as a prime location for certain high-tech activities are still in existence: high quality of life, rural setting, lower housing costs than Silicon Valley, and the presence of a highly educated labor pool.

POPULATION

Sonoma County experienced steady, moderate population growth until after World War II, when population growth accelerated rapidly. Since 1945, the county’s population has increased an average of 2.7 percent per year, with an overall six fold increase to its current level of 457,000. The county’s population has more than doubled since 1970, when 205,000 people called Sonoma County home.

Since 1970, the population concentration has shifted from unincorporated areas to



cities. In 1970, approximately 51 percent of the county’s population was living in unincorporated areas, reflecting the historically rural character of the county. However, during the 1970s population growth in the cities began to outpace growth in the unincorporated areas. This shift toward higher population concentration in the cities continued through the 1980s, and the incorporation of the Town of Windsor in 1992 further increased the county’s incorporated population. By 2003, 67 percent of the county’s population lived in cities (See Table 3).

The county’s nine cities currently accommodate about 310,000 people, three times as many as in 1970. This represents an average population density of about seven persons per urbanized acre. Most of Sonoma County’s cities have densities between six and eight persons per acre. Cloverdale and Healdsburg both fall below this range, but the City of Rohnert Park has a density of 9.5 persons per acre. Currently, 150,000 people live outside of cities, about 50 percent more than in 1970. About 40,000 of these people live in unincorporated communities, while the remaining 110,000 live in more dispersed patterns throughout rural residential or agricultural areas.

HOUSING

Driven by population and job growth, the number of housing units in the county increased steadily between 1980 and 2000, from 125,000 to 185,000 housing units. The majority of this housing was built in cities, and the majority of it was single-family detached housing. Eighty percent of all housing in Sonoma County is in the

Table 3
County Population Growth, 1970 - 2000

Area	1970	1980	1990	2000	Total Change	Percent Change	Avg. Annual Change
Incorporated	101,288	165,658	228,055	308,049	206,761	204%	3.8%
Unincorporated	<u>103,597</u>	<u>132,043</u>	<u>158,177</u>	<u>148,565</u>	<u>44,968</u>	<u>43%</u>	<u>1.2%</u>
County Population	204,885	297,701	386,232	456,614	251,729	123%	2.7%
Absolute Growth Last Decade	--	92,816	88,531	70,382	--	--	--
% Growth Last Decade	n/a	45%	30%	18%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Uninc'd as % of Total	51%	44%	41%	33%	18%	n/a	n/a

Source: California Department of Finance.

form of single-family homes. Between 1980 and 2000, over 46,000 single-family homes were built in unincorporated areas, while 10,000 new units of multi-family were added. Although the county's growth has been city-centered, the pattern of building single-family homes has kept densities (people per acre) relatively low.

In addition to growth within the cities there has been increased demand for rural estates in more remote and historically agricultural areas of the county, especially the hillsides surrounding urban areas, such as Sonoma Mountain and the hills north of Santa Rosa. This residential development generally consists of very large homes on large parcels of land, but it can have a significant impact on the rural character of an area when it occurs along ridgelines or other highly visible spots. In some cases, estate housing has displaced large parcels of land from agricultural production and negatively affected natural resource areas.

Growth in Sonoma County was historically fueled by its relatively low housing



prices. However, Sonoma County has now joined other Bay Area counties as one of the least affordable housing markets in the nation. Families with moderate incomes can no longer afford the median priced homes and new single-family homes are, for the most part, priced above a level affordable to these families.

GOVERNMENT ACTION

The most important decisions about growth and development take place within local government. Local government creates plans to guide growth and build the roads, sewers, and power grids to support development. Local government issues permits for residential and commercial construction, and establishes zoning laws to define where certain types of development may take place. City and county government actions combined with market forces and Sonoma County's geography have led to current land use trends.

State government exercises little direct control over land use decisions in Sonoma County. The state has authority over state highways, but it primarily influences land use through its spending on roads and other infrastructure projects. The federal government has historically had little influence over land use patterns in Sonoma County. However, its presence has been felt through environmental protection mandates like the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Endangered Species Act.

*ALTHOUGH THE COUNTY'S
GROWTH HAS BEEN
CITY-CENTERED, THE PATTERN OF
BUILDING SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES
HAS KEPT DENSITIES (PEOPLE PER
ACRE) RELATIVELY LOW.*

Following are the government actions that are expected to have the most influence on land use patterns in the foreseeable future:

Sonoma County General Plan. The County's General Plan has and will continue to have the greatest influence upon land use in the unincorporated portion of the county. The county is currently updating its General Plan, a process that takes place once every 15 years. The new plan will determine how and where the county will grow through 2020. The County Board of Supervisors has stated that changes to land use designations and zoning are not anticipated as part of the update.

Urban Growth Boundaries/City Development Patterns. The cities of Sonoma County have General Plans, spheres of influence, and voter-approved Urban Growth Boundaries (except Cloverdale) that clearly define the extent of urban growth for the foreseeable future. In the short term, annexations of unincorporated

territory will be located within these existing Urban Growth Boundaries. As the current terms of all the cities' Urban Growth Boundaries expire over the next 20 years, voters will decide whether to renew them. To avoid ever-expanding Urban Growth Boundaries that would eventually create an uninterrupted urbanized area along the Highway 101 corridor, cities in Sonoma County will likely need to use land more efficiently so that more people can live within the existing urban boundaries.

Funding for Infrastructure Expansion. Infrastructure, such as roads and water lines, has strongly influenced land use patterns in Sonoma County. Historically, generous federal and state grants funded major highway improvements and water projects that opened up new areas for development. Other types of urban infrastructure include power grids, wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal systems, as well as storm water and flood control facilities. Other often-overlooked forms of infrastructure include fire and police stations, schools, and hospitals.

*THE COUNTY'S GENERAL PLAN
HAS AND WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE
THE GREATEST INFLUENCE UPON
LAND USE IN THE
UNINCORPORATED PORTION OF
THE COUNTY.*

THE URBANIZED AREA OF THE COUNTY INCREASED 14,800 ACRES BETWEEN 1986 AND 2000, WHILE THE AGRICULTURAL AREA DECLINED BY 15,000 ACRES OVER THE SAME PERIOD.

Federal and state funding for large-scale infrastructure improvements is now largely unavailable. Today existing residents and new developments generally share the cost of infrastructure expansion. Local residents subsidize the construction of new roads, water lines, and schools through local taxation, and development projects must pay impact fees to share the costs they impose on the community for new infrastructure. Development projects usually incorporate the increased costs into the price of new homes or commercial development. Under current funding conditions, infrastructure generally “follows” demand for new residential and commercial development and does not “lead” it.

Federal and State Endangered Species Regulation. In the last thirty years, land use patterns have been affected by federal and state laws to protect endangered species and their habitats. Proposals for land use changes have been challenged in court on the basis of protections estab-

lished by the federal Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act (Section 401), as well as the California Endangered Species Act. In Sonoma County, the federal listing of the Coho Salmon and other fish species as endangered could potentially limit the diversion of water from rivers and streams, consequently limiting water supplies available for urban and agricultural use. Development in habitat areas for the California Tiger Salamander has also been challenged, and may lead to limits on land use even in areas within existing urban boundaries.

LAND USE TRENDS

The spread of urban growth from 1850 through 2000 in Sonoma County is shown by **Map 4**. The urbanized area of the county increased 14,800 acres between 1986 and 2000, while the agricultural area declined by 15,000 acres over the same period. The percent increase in urbanized land is similar to the percent increase in the county’s population over the same period, reflecting the construction of



single-family homes and a relatively constant population density on urbanized lands. Although urbanization was the primary cause for the loss of agricultural lands, significant changes also occurred between agricultural land uses and the distribution of farmland among agricultural product types. For example, certain types of irrigated farmlands, such as wine grapes, increased while grazing lands diminished.

Natural resource areas have also been affected by changing land use trends with conversions of evergreen, deciduous, and mixed forestlands. Between 1988 and 2000, about 3,300 acres of forests scattered throughout the county were converted for agricultural uses and 480 acres were developed for housing, including rural estates.

*BETWEEN 1988 AND 2000, ABOUT
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CHAPTER 3

A LOOK AHEAD:

SONOMA COUNTY IN 2025 AND 2040



Within all local debates about growth, one thing is certain: increasing numbers of people will live and work in Sonoma County in the coming decades. Where they live and work will depend on the decisions made by local governments, the nature of future economic growth, the design and location of new developments, as well as the desires and purchasing power of local residents. The city-centered growth policies that Sonoma County has embraced since the late 1970s have created the diverse, attractive, and highly productive urban and rural landscapes that the county enjoys today, but in order to protect open space and promote the agricultural industry, cities must adopt new policies and strategies to accommodate future growth.

To evaluate future growth, how and where this growth might occur was analyzed using three land use models: vigorous city-centered growth; urban fringe growth; and rural dispersion growth. The projected population for the years 2025 and 2040 was used to demonstrate how Sonoma County might look depending on the pattern of future growth and development. For both 2025 and 2040 the three land use models were created based on assumptions concerning the distribution of growth within the following four areas of the county (See **Table 4**):

- Inside the cities' Urban Growth Boundaries and Cloverdale's Sphere of Influence.
- Inside county unincorporated communities, for example Bodega Bay, Guerneville, Forestville or Glen Ellen.
- On the urban fringe, through either an expansion or expiration of the Urban Growth Boundaries or amendment to the County General Plan.
- Dispersed to rural areas of the county, outside of Urban Growth Boundaries and unincorporated communities.

**Table 4
Housing Unit Distribution by Growth Projection and Area**

Area	2025 Projection (50,000 Units)			2040 Projection (115,000 Units)		
	City Cent.	Urban Exp.	Rural Disp.	City Cent.	Urban Exp.	Rural Disp.
Cities (UGBs) (1)	45,000	35,749	35,749	103,500	51,070	51,070
County Urban Service Areas	500	389	389	555	555	555
Urban Fringe	0	8,290	3,659	0	37,897	16,729
Rural Dispersed	<u>4,501</u>	<u>5,573</u>	<u>10,203</u>	<u>10,945</u>	<u>25,478</u>	<u>46,646</u>
Total	50,000	50,000	50,000	115,000	115,000	115,000

(1) Cloverdale does not have a UGB; the Sphere of Influence (S.O.I.) is used as a proxy.
Sources: Association of Bay Area Governments; California Department of Finance; Consultant Team.

Overall, this analysis determined that future growth will increase pressure to develop open space and agricultural lands outside existing urban boundaries. While there is enough vacant land within existing Urban Growth Boundaries to accommodate substantial growth through 2025, this land will be consumed rapidly if the vast majority of future development continues to follow the current model of building large, single-family detached homes far from shopping and jobs. As the land within existing cities is developed, there will be increasing pressure to expand urban boundaries outward and to build on agricultural lands and open space. Changes in zoning that allow

housing development in former industrial areas, as well as increased emphasis on community-oriented development will enable Sonoma County to grow in a way that accommodates population and job growth while protecting agricultural lands and the environment.

2025 GROWTH PROJECTIONS AND DISTRIBUTIONS

Growth through 2025 was assessed based on 2002 projections by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). ABAG's projections anticipate that an additional 130,000 people will reside in Sonoma County by 2025, equivalent to the need for about 50,000 new housing units. This implies the addition of about 65,000 new persons and 25,000 new residences per decade, similar to but lower than the growth rate of the 1990s, and well below the growth rate of the 1970s and 1980s. Using this growth projection, the following land use models were created based on specific assumptions concerning the level of growth in the four areas:

*FUTURE GROWTH WILL INCREASE
PRESSURE TO DEVELOP OPEN
SPACE AND AGRICULTURAL LANDS
OUTSIDE EXISTING URBAN
BOUNDARIES.*

Vigorous City-Centered Growth. This model assumes that 90 percent of new housing (45,000 units) is built within the cities' Urban Growth Boundaries. The county's unincorporated communities are assumed to accommodate 1 percent of the total new development (500 units). The remaining 9 percent (4,500 units) is assumed to be dispersed throughout the rural areas of the county, and the Urban Growth Boundaries are assumed to hold in their current locations.

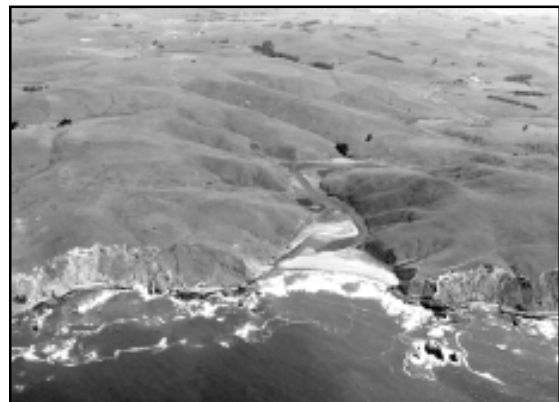
Urban Fringe Growth. This model assumes that 70 percent of new residential development (35,750) is accommodated in the cities' current Urban Growth Boundaries, and 390 new units are placed in unincorporated communities. The remainder of the growth, or 29 percent (13,900 units) is assumed to spill out beyond the Urban Growth Boundaries. Roughly 60 percent of the units that spill over (8,300 units) are assumed to locate at the urban fringe, while the remainder is dispersed throughout the rural areas of the county.

Rural Dispersed Growth. This model assumes 70 percent of new residential development (35,750 units) is accommodated within the cities' current Urban Growth Boundaries, and 390 housing units are placed in unincorporated communities. However, in this case, 10,200 units, about 75 percent of the remaining 13,900 units are assumed to be dispersed throughout the rural areas of the county,

while about 25 percent, 3,700 units, are assumed to locate at the urban fringe.

IMPLICATIONS OF 2025 GROWTH PROJECTIONS

Following the vigorous city-centered approach to future development would best protect agricultural land and open space through 2025. However, in order to place 90 percent of all new residential development within existing urban boundaries, it is essential to use the land in urban areas more efficiently. This requires cities to accommodate more people on a fixed amount of land than current development provides. Sonoma County's cities currently have an average density of seven people per acre; these cities could absorb 90 percent of projected population growth if they simply increase the average number of people per acre for new development to seven and one-half persons. If this growth is not accommodated inside existing urban boundaries, as shown in the urban expansion and rural dispersed growth models, it will lead to the development of agricultural land and open space and increased pressure to expand Urban Growth Boundaries.



**Table 5
Urban Development Capacity**

City	UGB Capacity (Max. Density)	UGB Capacity (Typical Density) (1)
Cloverdale (2)	5,549	3,884
Cotati	159	111
Healdsburg	778	545
Petaluma	5,220	3,654
Rohnert Park	4,450	3,115
Santa Rosa	25,600	17,920
Sebastopol	1,171	820
Sonoma	1,843	1,290
Windsor	<u>6,300</u>	4,410
Total	51,070	35,749

(1) Typical densities in Sonoma County are below maximum densities, on average around 70 percent of the maximum.

(2) Cloverdale does not have a UGB. These estimates were based on Cloverdale's Sphere of Influence (S.O.I.)

Source: Respective City Planning Departments.

The implication of these models is that there will be considerable growth pressure on the county's agricultural lands and rural areas unless the remaining developable land within existing urban boundaries is used more efficiently in the next twenty years. Without building housing that accommodates slightly more people per acre than current development, residential capacity inside the cities will only accommodate a total of approximately 35,000 units (See Table 5). This means pressure will build on the Urban Growth Boundaries prior to 2025, and more growth will spill into rural areas.

2040 GROWTH PROJECTIONS AND DISTRIBUTIONS

Because the period 2020 to 2025 could be the time when the county's cities may run

low on developable land, a second set of distribution models consider growth projections between 2000 and 2040. The California Department of Finance 1998 projections estimate between 2000 and 2040 an additional 295,000 people will be added to the county, requiring the equivalent of 115,000 new housing units. This implies the addition of about 75,000 new persons and 29,000 new residences per decade, greater than the growth rate in the 1990s, though still below growth rate in the 1970s and 1980s. Using this growth projection, the following land use models were created based on specific assumptions concerning the level of growth in the four areas:

Vigorous City-Centered Growth. This model assumes that 90 percent of new residential development (103,500 units) is

accommodated in cities' current Urban Growth Boundaries. The county's unincorporated communities are assumed to accommodate 100 percent of their capacity (555 units). The remaining 9.5 percent of the growth (11,000 units) is assumed to be dispersed throughout rural areas of the county.

Urban Fringe Growth. This model assumes that 45 percent of new residential development (51,000 units) occurs within in cities' current Urban Growth Boundaries, or the equivalent of 100 percent of maximum using currently permitted population densities. The county's unincorporated communities are also assumed to accommodate 100 percent of their capacity (555 units). The remaining 45 percent of new growth (63,400 units) is assumed to spill out beyond current Urban Growth Boundaries. Roughly 60 percent of the units that spill over (37,900 units) are assumed to locate at the urban fringe, while the remainder (25,500) is dispersed throughout rural areas of the county.

Rural Dispersed Growth. This model assumes that 45 percent of new residential development (51,000 units) occurs within in cities' current Urban Growth Boundaries, with 555 units built in unincorporated communities. However, in this case, 46,700 units, about 75 percent of the remaining 63,400 units, are assumed to be dispersed throughout rural areas of the county, while about 25 percent, 16,700

units, are assumed to locate at the urban fringe.

IMPLICATIONS OF 2040 GROWTH MODELS

The projected population in 2040 can be accommodated without significant pressure to develop agricultural land and open space only if new land use policies require more efficient land use within existing urban boundaries. Under the city-centered growth model, Sonoma County's cities could accommodate 90 percent of the predicted population growth (265,000 persons) if they increase the average people per acre for new developments from 7 to 17. This would require cities to promote increased construction of multi-family buildings, such as two to four story buildings that place housing above shops. If this level of

THERE WILL BE CONSIDERABLE GROWTH PRESSURE ON THE COUNTY'S AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND RURAL AREAS UNLESS THE REMAINING DEVELOPABLE LAND WITHIN EXISTING URBAN BOUNDARIES IS USED MORE EFFICIENTLY IN THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS.

*IF SONOMA COUNTY IS TO RETAIN A
STRONG AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY
AS WELL AS A HEALTHY
ENVIRONMENT THROUGH 2040
AND BEYOND, CITY AND COUNTY
LEADERS NEED TO EXPAND UPON
THE CURRENT POLICIES THAT
PROMOTE CITY-CENTERED
GROWTH.*

growth is not accommodated within the current urban boundaries, as shown in the urban expansion and rural dispersed growth models, it will compromise the integrity of the Urban Growth Boundaries and the County General Plan. If the cities do not achieve higher densities now, Urban Growth Boundaries will need to be expanded in the future and sprawl development will likely result.

If Sonoma County is to retain a strong agricultural industry as well as a healthy environment through 2040 and beyond, city and county leaders need to expand upon the current policies that promote city-centered growth. In the long term, pressure to build on open space and agricultural land can be avoided only if cities encourage development that allows more people to fit into existing urban areas, for example by decreasing the

maximum lot size for single-family homes or increasing the amount of housing in city centers (by building three to four story buildings instead of one to two story buildings). Without the immediate and aggressive enactment of policies that support more efficient use of land within cities, either the Urban Growth Boundaries will be expanded or growth will be displaced to other counties and county land and housing prices will become less and less affordable.



CHAPTER 4

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



This report seeks to evaluate the effects of current land use policies in Sonoma County and recommend policy options that can accommodate future growth. There is general agreement that future growth in Sonoma County is inevitable. The key question is: how and where will this new development take place? In order to accommodate additional urban development, safeguard natural resources, and strengthen the agricultural industry, Sonoma County needs to maintain current policies that satisfy these varied interests, as well as develop new land use policies that meet future needs.

The policy options provided below identify land use policies and programs that could help manage future growth in Sonoma County. They form the begin-

nings of a policy agenda and are broken into two sets. The first set – Joint Policy Recommendations – outlines those policies where specific agreement between the environmental and agricultural groups exists. The second set – Policy Options for Further Consideration – are policies the Steering Committee felt were worthy of merit but in need of further analysis prior to recommending implementation.

JOINT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Maintain a strong County General Plan that focuses growth into already developed areas and protects agricultural and natural resource lands.**

Sonoma County has successfully maintained extensive agricultural areas and

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 1:

*MAINTAIN A STRONG COUNTY
GENERAL PLAN THAT FOCUSES
GROWTH INTO ALREADY
DEVELOPED AREAS AND
PROTECTS AGRICULTURAL AND
NATURAL RESOURCE LANDS.*

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 2:

SUPPORT LOCAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS THAT ENCOURAGE MORE EFFICIENT USE OF LAND WITHIN EXISTING URBAN BOUNDARIES.

beautiful natural areas, while accommodating significant population growth in the twenty-five years since the first County General Plan was adopted. The General Plan acts as a blueprint for growth and development for the county's unincorporated 950,000 acres. Strong policies encouraging city-centered growth, preservation of agricultural lands, and community separation must be maintained over the long term if Sonoma County is to retain its diverse landscape and high quality of life.

2. Support local policies and programs that encourage more efficient use of land within existing urban boundaries.

Land within Urban Growth Boundaries must be efficiently utilized. Development must meet or exceed densities set forth in current city general plans and zoning ordinances. Actual development tends to occur at the low end of the density ranges established by current policies, and accommodating few people on newly developed land generates increased

pressure for sprawl development at the urban edge. To promote the efficient use of urban land, cities can adopt policies such as redevelopment project areas and specific plans for urban centers, adopting minimum density standards, reducing parking standards, creating overlay districts, providing density bonuses to developers, and reviewing and possibly removing some regulations on infill development. Achieving higher density development and increasing the attractiveness of urban areas will also require additional investments in circulation improvements, transit, parks and recreation, and other urban amenities.

3. Encourage Cloverdale to adopt an Urban Growth Boundary.

An Urban Growth Boundary should be defined and enacted in Cloverdale. Eight of the county's nine cities have voter approved Urban Growth Boundaries that help limit urban sprawl, preserve agricultural land, and protect the unique identities of Sonoma County's cities. Stable and permanent urban boundaries and the physical separation of urban areas are established public values in Sonoma

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 3:

ENCOURAGE CLOVERDALE TO ADOPT AN URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 4:

***EXTEND FUNDING FOR THE
SONOMA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL
PRESERVATION AND OPEN SPACE
DISTRICT.***

County. This matter should be addressed by the residents and elected officials of Cloverdale.

4. Extend funding for the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District is one of the top ten farmland and open space preservation programs in the nation, and the first special district established for the purpose of protecting agricultural lands. Since its formation in 1990, the District has preserved over 58,000 acres of land through conservation easement and/or

***LAND WITHIN URBAN GROWTH
BOUNDARIES MUST BE EFFICIENTLY
UTILIZED. DEVELOPMENT MUST
MEET OR EXCEED DENSITIES SET
FORTH IN CURRENT CITY GENERAL
PLANS AND ZONING ORDINANCES.***

fee title purchases. Sonoma County voters approved a special 1/4 percent sales tax over a 20-year period that provides approximately \$17 million in annual funding for the District's land conservation program. This sales tax will expire in 2011. It is critical that Sonoma County voters approve another measure to reauthorize the sales tax and extend the District's primary funding source.

POLICY OPTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. Promote regional solutions to infrastructure financing and land use policies.

Coordination among local governments, including the county, the cities, and special districts, will be necessary to assure adequate infrastructure capacity within cities and minimize competition that results in undesirable land use patterns. At present, the county, cities, and special districts are cooperating through numerous agreements; however, these agreements could be expanded to address matters such as sewage treatment and disposal, transportation and transit





services, affordable housing, and securing greenbelts.

2. Support transit and transit-oriented development.

With the state's chartering of the Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit District in 2002, which is charged with providing rail transit along the existing Northwestern Pacific rail lines, an additional opportunity has arisen to improve access to urban areas. In order to provide rail service through Marin and Sonoma Counties, voters from both districts will need to approve a transit bond measure. Rail service provides opportunities to define transit-oriented development areas that place housing close to commercial and retail developments. Cities can encourage such development through the use of specific plans and zoning overlay districts.

3. Conserve agricultural lands.

Agriculture is an important part of Sonoma County's social, cultural, and economic life. Despite the loss of agricultural acreage in the last few decades, a

substantial portion of agricultural land is protected from development, and the agricultural industry remains very strong. More active conservation efforts, such as strengthened agricultural designations and zoning, expanded agricultural districts, and the continued purchase of conservation easements, could assure that these lands remain in agricultural use in perpetuity.

4. Minimize conflicts between land uses.

The interface of agricultural operations with urban areas and scattered rural residential development create the poten-

POLICY OPTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION:

1. *PROMOTE REGIONAL SOLUTIONS TO INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCING AND LAND USE POLICES.*
2. *SUPPORT TRANSIT AND TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT.*
3. *CONSERVE AGRICULTURAL LANDS.*
4. *MINIMIZE CONFLICTS BETWEEN LAND USES.*
5. *SUPPORT AGRICULTURE THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES.*
6. *REQUIRE CLUSTERING OF RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION EASEMENTS IN SENSITIVE HABITAT AREAS.*
7. *PURSUE AGREEMENT ON POLICIES TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES LANDS.*
8. *PURSUE REGIONAL APPROACHES TO HABITAT CONSERVATION.*
9. *PROMOTE REGIONAL MULTI-AGENCY FUNDING FOR KEY NATURAL RESOURCE AREA ACQUISITIONS.*

tial for conflict. Existing land use policy addresses these impacts, but additional efforts could reduce the potential for conflict. Such policies include a “Right to Farm” ordinance, agricultural buffers zones, more efficient use of land in rural areas, easements for increased access to rivers and for bike and wildlife corridors.

5. Support agriculture through economic development initiatives.

Agriculture in Sonoma County is facing increasing global competition. While land use policies intended to retain agricultural land uses are a necessary part of preserving the industry, viable economic conditions for farmers and ranchers must also exist. Thus, policies and programs that sustain and enhance agriculture as a business activity and industry should be pursued. Value-added activities related to processing and marketing of specialty foods offer the best opportunity to succeed in this competitive environment and to create markets for locally produced crops and livestock products. Agricultural processing and support industries should be promoted through coordinated economic development efforts by the county, city, and industry that address land supply, water, and labor force issues. This includes Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs for local land leases for high-value crops, the encouragement of farmers’ markets and the involvement of cities in the planning and development of nearby agriculture.

6. Require clustering of residential development and conservation easements in sensitive habitat areas.

Market trends in Sonoma County are resulting in the development of many estate homes on large and very large rural parcels of land in hillside and agricultural areas. The potential impact of these estate homes on sensitive habitats and agricultural productivity could be reduced through clustering and design requirements for rural areas, and conservation easements for sensitive habitats.

7. Pursue agreement on policies to protect natural resources lands.

Habitat maintenance, erosion prevention, and water quality require protection and management of watersheds, oak woodlands, timberlands, wetlands, riparian corridors, and habitat connectivity. Efforts to maintain sustainable ecosystems raise difficult issues, complicated by changing state and federal regulations, incomplete mapping, and gaps in biological information. New and amended environmental resource protection policies could avoid unnecessary or inequitable regulation.



8. Pursue regional approaches to habitat conservation.

The biological diversity of the county includes a large number of threatened and endangered species regulated by the state and federal governments. Meeting these regulations has been a challenge for individual property owners, developers, the county, and city governments. The federal and state statutes offer a regional approach to multi-species habitat protection – habitat conservation plans or environmental preservation overlay districts – that can reduce the burden of federal and state regulation on individual projects while increasing the benefit to the targeted species.

9. Promote regional multi-agency funding for key natural resource area acquisitions.

Expand funding and coordination among conservation organizations, including state and local agencies and local and national conservation organizations to fund the purchase of key biodiversity sites. The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District commonly works cooperatively with state, federal, and private organizations as a part of its acquisition efforts.

