



# **Farm Bureau of Ventura County Land-Use Policy**

**Adopted March 1997**

## LAND USE POLICY

**PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE.** The purpose of this policy is to provide the association with framework by which it can measure, address, and direct land use issues that affect Ventura County agriculture. The Farm Bureau of Ventura County seeks to influence a land use policy in the county that is arrived at by orderly and representative means using the best resources of local government. It also seeks a land use policy that not only benefits agriculture, but also works for the overall, comprehensive public good. The fundamental objective of FBVC's policy is to maintain the long term integrity and viability of commercial agriculture as a major contributor to the county's economic base.

1. **PROCESS.** Land use decisions should be made using the orderly due processes of local representative government in administering laws and regulations promulgated by state legislative action. In Ventura County, FBVC supports the full use of the General Plan process, the Guidelines for Orderly Development, and the Local Agency Formation Commission in addressing land use issues.

FBVC believes that judicious and sound land use decisions cannot be made using the initiative or referendum processes. Land use is a complicated issue having profound economic and social consequences for the entire community over the long term. Deliberative government processes which take into account the interests of all stakeholders, including landowners, result in the most appropriate land use decisions.

2. **AGRICULTURE AN ULTIMATE ZONING.** Agriculture is an important land use providing substantial long-term economic and social benefits to the community. The stature of agricultural zoning should be considered equal to that of other permanent zoning designations.

Agriculture is sometimes viewed as a temporary land use until a different higher and better use surfaces, or as a resource of inexpensive or remote land for particular government or private projects. This attitude leads to an impairment to the integrity of agricultural zoning designations and threatens the viability of long term commercial agriculture.

Agriculture by its very nature provides to the urban communities the amenity of open space. However, this is an incidental benefit and must always rest upon land use policies which are guided by a recognition of genuine commercial, economic agricultural value. Where open space or parkland attributes are paramount, then the urban communities should share in the provision of those benefits, especially when agricultural land becomes landlocked within a city's boundaries.

3. **ADHERENCE TO GENERAL PLAN.** The county General Plan is the fundamental building block for determining long-term land use policy in Ventura County. As such it must be adhered to by county government. The county General Plan further should not be exposed to predations from other government entities

seeking to expand their land bases. Agriculturally zoned areas must be protected from encroachments by cities seeking to expand into areas outside of their own general plans or in areas outside of their spheres of influence. Cities' amendments to their general plans should be limited to areas within their spheres of influence. Similarly, public schools, federal and state institutions and other governmental entities with the power of eminent domain should respect the agricultural designations of the General Plan.

4. CITY BOUNDARIES. If agriculture is to be preserved in Ventura County, it is necessary to consider that cities must accept finite geographical boundaries, beyond which further expansion is not envisioned. The urban needs of the cities should, in the future, be met within these established city boundaries. FBVC supports development *within* established city boundaries, and believes consideration should particularly be given to high density and redevelopment type projects. If encroachment on to agricultural land must occur, then it should be done in a manner that is an efficient use of the land and that minimizes the impact to agriculture. It must also be recognized that any encroachment adversely affects the long-term viability of agriculture in Ventura County.

Restrictive urban boundaries are essential for the free market to recognize the values of urban land. By adhering to boundaries, value within the cities is created to promote re-development. Conversely, restrictive urban boundaries also protect agriculturally zoned lands by relieving from them speculative values created by urbanization pressures. Farmland that enjoys a free market based on agricultural values is essential for land to remain in long-term agricultural production.

5. GREENBELTS. Currently, agricultural greenbelt agreements are non-binding joint or co-adopted resolutions by cities, the county (when applicable), and LAFCO to agree to cooperatively administer a policy of non-annexation and non-development in specific areas. As cities determine their boundaries, an important consideration should be agriculture's need to have contiguous lands. Commercial agriculture is dramatically impeded where it is reduced to operating in "islands" within broader urban areas. Currently there is physical linkage between prime farmlands in the Santa Clara and Las Posas Valleys and the Oxnard Plain. This connection is extremely important to the long-term success of Ventura County agriculture.

Therefore, FBVC strongly supports the strengthening of General Plan and other zoning regulations to stiffen and uphold the intent of agricultural greenbelts. In some cases, minor enhancements are needed to harmonize existing greenbelt areas, such as in Santa Paula Canyon, and in linking the greenbelts east and west of Santa Paula. In view of proposed development in adjacent Los Angeles County, FBVC further supports the establishment of an additional greenbelt to run from the City of Fillmore's eastern boundary east to the county line, with an exclusion area for the Piru unincorporated urban center.

6. “PRIME” VERSUS “NON-PRIME” AGRICULTURAL LAND. A reasonable distinction between prime and non-prime agricultural land needs to be established and respected. “Prime” agricultural lands are generally defined as those being on plains and valley floor areas enjoying rich, deep soils, good drainage, and sound water supplies. “Non-prime” lands are normally those other lands in agricultural production without these amenities, such as hillsides and some canyons. These lands are less intensively farmed and generally support only low per acre crop values.

FBVC land use policy is concerned with all agricultural land, but it is specifically directed towards the preservation of “prime” agricultural land that supports long-term, high value crop production. Recognizing that some additional agricultural lands will be absorbed by the cities as they rationalize their growth needs, general plans should direct this growth, where it is necessary, into “non-prime” areas.

Ventura County must accommodate a variety of sometimes-competing land uses. It is recognized that some key “prime” land parcels, because of location, must be looked at situationally. In these cases care must be taken not to subvert the overall county General Plan with regard to agriculture lands.

7. ECONOMIC UNITS OF PRODUCTION. FBVC supports the maintenance of parcel sizes in agricultural zoned areas that provide realistic economic units for commercial agricultural production. Once established, deviation from General Plan property sizes should not be allowed. Efforts to reduce parcel sizes and provide for the division of agricultural lands into smaller units are not in the interest of long-term agriculture and should be scrutinized very carefully in the planning process. Subdivision of “prime” agricultural lands should be permitted only within established city general plan boundaries, and “non-prime” subdivision should be allowed only in areas contiguous to existing urban developments.
8. RIGHT TO FARM. Viable agriculture means profitable agriculture. Agriculture in Ventura County is characterized by a growing interface with the urban community. It is important that agriculture have at its disposal the tools, cultural practices, and infrastructure necessary to produce crops that can succeed in a competitive marketplace. At the same time it is important that farmers be good neighbors to their urban neighbors. To protect agriculture’s growing space and to insulate farmers from nuisances that can arise from the urban dwellers lack of understanding about necessary cultural practices, FBVC strongly urges that county government and cities adopt comprehensive right to farm ordinances. These ordinances should not only recognize basic farm practices but also the need for related farm services such as transportation and packing house facilities.
9. CONSERVATION PROGRAMS. FBVC promotes the long-term vitality of commercial agriculture in Ventura County. In general, we favor maintaining agricultural land without deed restrictions to provide agricultural owners with the maximum ability to manage their resources. However, we realize in an urbanizing

environment it is sometimes practical to allow deed restrictions in order to provide for continued commercial agriculture. As such, we support programs such as voluntary conservation easements and development rights transference, and more importantly, the property tax benefits as provided under the Land Conservation (Williamson) Act, in order to maintain the long term economic agricultural productivity of farmland.

Agricultural land trusts have proven useful vehicles in other counties for holding property restrictions and provide an additional estate-planning tool for farmers. FBVC supports the Ventura County Agricultural Land Trust provided no mandatory government programs are associated with it and provided no taxes are imposed on agriculture in its support. Participation in a VCALT program must be voluntary and not conditioned upon permit approval, property transfer, estate planning execution or any other right normally associated with property ownership.

FBVC believes VCALT, in conjunction with the urban communities, has an important role to play in preserving agricultural productivity in farm areas under pressures of urbanization, provided the prime motivation remains the economic viability of agriculture and not the provision of inexpensive open space to the urban dweller.