



March 22, 2004
PC Meeting Room, Resource Management Agency
5961 S. Mooney Blvd., Visalia, CA 93292

The second workshop with the Tulare County Agricultural Advisory Committee took place on March 22, 2004. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Committee to review issues and assets identified by the public at the first series of community workshops, discuss the information contained in the Preliminary Issues Report, and discuss policy considerations and potential strategies.



Overall Themes

The discussion resulted in three overall themes emerging:

Value of Agriculture

There needs to be a broader awareness about the economic value of agriculture to the residents of the County and better information about the synergy and co-dependency between urban and farm economies.

Preserving the Ability to Farm

The discussion should not be about preserving farms but about the ability to continue farming. Land use policies often focus on preserving farms or farmland rather than preserving the ability to farm. Global competition, regulations, conflicts with residential development, real estate pressures, high labor and Workers Compensation costs, and other factors make the business of agriculture increasingly challenging. The diverging nature of farming, with corporations consolidating their contract share of market products and purchasing farms, or farmers splitting into smaller home sites, needs to be considered.

Be an Advocate for Agriculture

The County needs to be an advocate for farming at the national and state level. As one of the most important agricultural counties in the country, Tulare County should be an advocate.

Meeting Summary

The Committee discussed a number of issues during the meeting. These issues fell under three broad topic areas: land use, transportation, and factors for success.

Land Use

- Migration and population growth puts pressure on land (new residential units near agriculture often results in complaints about farms and trucks without understanding the economic value of agriculture).
- There is a need to understand the economic trade-off between farming and housing.
- Having a strong housing market and farming is a challenge.
- Urban land values are escalating while agricultural land in Tulare County remains the most affordable land in California at \$50,000/acre.
- Land use and environmental regulations impact farming.
- Schools locating on the periphery of cities lead growth into agricultural lands.
- Is the Rural Valley Lands Plan still effective? Is it comprehensive enough? too simple?
- We need to preserve the ability to farm in order to preserve farms.
- Industrial, not residential uses, should be located downwind of dairies.
- How do we support an "agricultural society"?
- Diversity of farming is based on having a diversity of farms.
- The middle size farms are the most threatened and are either being purchased by corporations or are getting split into 40-acre hobby farms and home sites.
- The current trends may result in agricultural-residential and larger production farms.

Transportation and Information Infrastructure

- County roads are in poor condition.
- The condition of roads impacts air quality due to dust.
- Roads are sized for agricultural uses but not for urban expansion.
- Major freeways will be increasingly crowded as development occurs conflicting with truck use during peak market season.
- The movement of information was also discussed:
 - a. Many areas are too remote to get high-speed access
 - b. There is not high enough demand to support service in many locations in the County

Factors for Success: Sustainable Future for Agriculture

- The County needs to be an advocate for infrastructure and land use policies that support agriculture.
- Land use policies need to recognize the long-term economic benefit that agriculture provides rather than the short-term fiscal needs.
- Institutional uses, such as schools, to leapfrog into rural areas, should not be allowed in rural areas since they enable sprawl, which raises conflicts with agriculture.
- The County needs land use policies that protect agriculture as a priority in all elements (look at loss of agriculture in Los Angeles County and the Inland Empire).
- Housing is getting built on the valley floor. Can more be done in foothills in order to limit

agriculture impacts?

- A point system, like the RVLDP and dairy permitting systems, should be developed using air quality criteria as a basis for permitting development. Air quality credits should be given for agricultural uses.
- Environmental and strategic benefits of farming should be of national importance.
- Who pays and who benefits from environmental costs?
- What kind of incentives can be used to protect farms?