

## 4.1 Agricultural Resources

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This section evaluates impacts on agriculture and forestry resources associated with implementation of the 2045 General Plan Update. Because this Program EIR is a long-term document intended to guide actions up to 2045, this analysis relies on program-level evaluation.

### 4.1.1 Setting

#### a. California Agricultural Resources

According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, over a third of the country's vegetables and two-thirds of the country's fruits and nuts are grown in California. In 2023, California's farms and ranches received \$55.4 billion in cash receipts for their output. This represents a 1.4 percent increase in cash receipts compared to 2022. California agricultural exports totaled \$23.6 billion in 2022, an increase of 4.4 percent from 2021. Top commodities for export included almonds, dairy and dairy products, pistachios, walnuts, and wine (California Department of Food and Agriculture 2024).

The California Department of Conservation (DOC) develops Important Farmland Maps as part of its Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) and includes the following definitions for Important Farmland and other non-farmland land uses (DOC 2025a):

1. **Prime Farmland.** Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
2. **Farmland of Statewide Importance.** Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
3. **Unique Farmland.** Farmland of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
4. **Farmland of Local Importance.** Land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee. In some counties, Confined Animal Agriculture facilities are part of Farmland of Local Importance, but they are shown separately.
5. **Grazing Land.** Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock. This category was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen's Association, University of California Cooperative Extension, and other groups interested in the extent of grazing activities.
6. **Urban and Built-up Land.** Land occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately 6 structures to a 10-acre parcel. This land is used for residential, industrial, commercial, construction, institutional, public administration, railroad and other transportation yards, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, water control structures, and other developed purposes.

7. **Other Land.** Land not included in any other mapping category. Common examples include low density rural developments; brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing; confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities; strip mines and borrow pits; and water bodies smaller than 40 acres. Vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is mapped as Other Land.

**b. Plan Area Agricultural Resources**

Table 4.1-1, below, provides the acreage of each farmland type in the plan area and annexation area. As shown therein, the plan area contains approximately 5,116 acres of Important Farmland. Figure 4.1-1, shows the distribution of different Important Farmlands in the plan area. In addition to Important Farmland, the plan area also includes nine acres of Grazing Land which is considered Prime agricultural land by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) definition. There are no Williamson Act lands within the city limits but, as shown in Figure 4.1-2, the annexation area includes approximately 212 acres of Williamson Act lands.

It should be noted that the Williamson Act lands in the annexation area are all currently in nonrenewal, which starts a countdown to the expiration of the contract. This includes three contracts that are set to expire in January of 2026 (71AP072), 2027 (85AP008) and 2028 (70AP148). This is typically nine years for standard Williamson Act contracts and nineteen years for Farmland Security Zone contracts, which are a stricter version of the Williamson Act contract that offer greater property tax savings and longer-term protection for farmland (DOC 2025b). During this period, the land remains subject to all the restrictions and benefits of the Williamson Act contract until it fully expires. Nonrenewal allows landowners to eventually transition their land to other uses while still adhering to the contract's terms during the countdown period. At the end of the nonrenewal process, the contract will be terminated and the land will no longer be under contract as Williamson Act land.

**Table 4.1-1 Summary of Important Farmland in the Plan Area and Annexation Area**

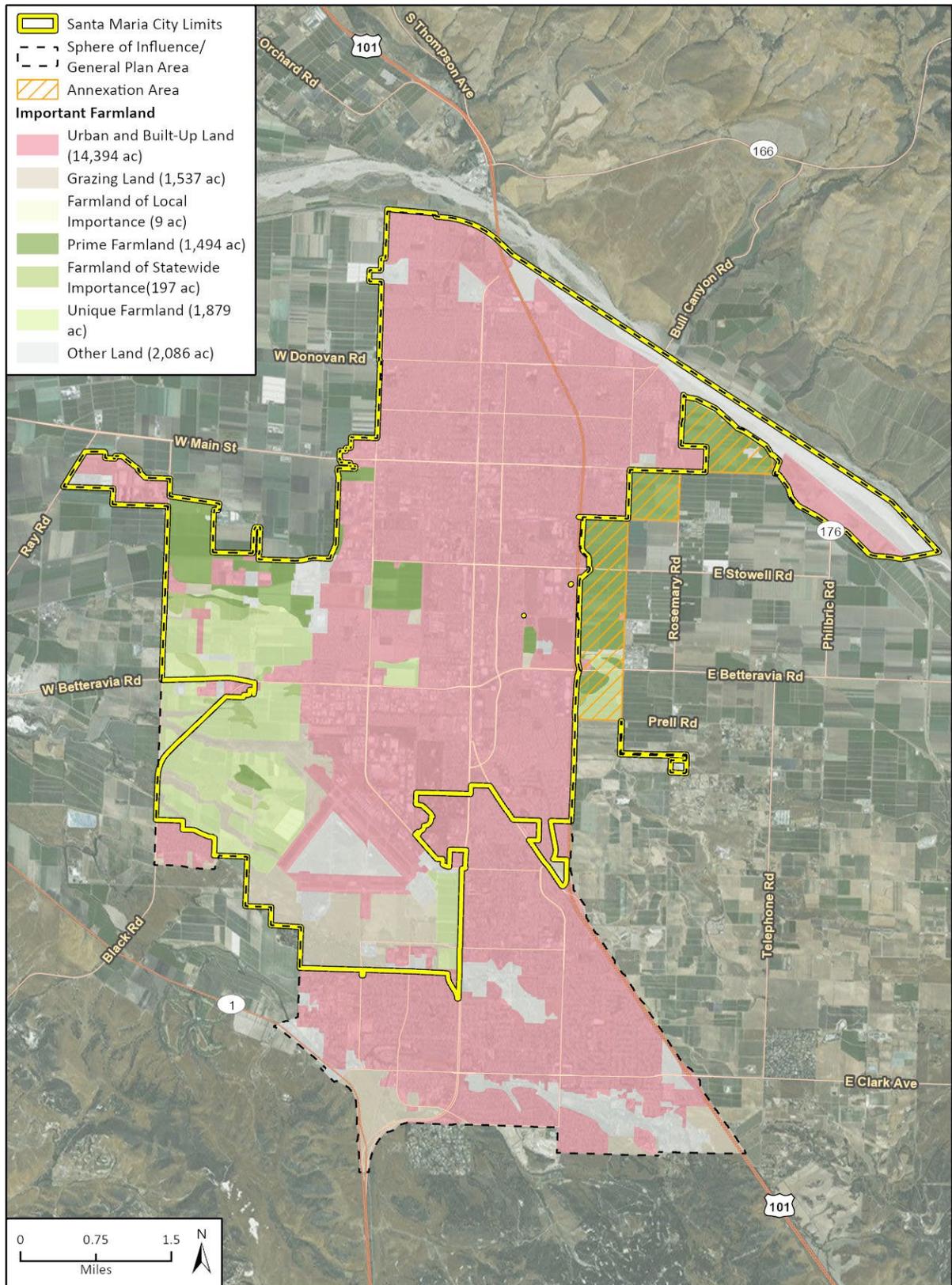
Farmland Designation	City Limits and SOI	Annexation Areas	Total Acreage
Prime Farmland	691	803	1,494
Farmland of Statewide Importance	190	7	197
Unique Farmland	1,745	134	1,879
Farmland of Local Importance	9	–	9
Grazing Land	1537	–	1,537
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,172</b>	<b>944<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>5,116</b>

<sup>1</sup> The remaining 41 acres within the annexation area are not considered to be prime or unique farmland or farmland of local or statewide importance.

**LAFCO and Farmland**

In reviewing applications for proposed annexations, LAFCO is required to consider the proposals impact to agriculture, including prime agricultural land as defined in Government Code Section 56064. As described in Section 1.5 1.3, Lead, Responsible, and Trustee Agencies, LAFCO is a Responsible Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Federal, State, and local agencies, including Santa Barbara LAFCO, all operate under different laws and requirements, each setting out different definitions of prime farmland. The definition of agricultural lands and prime agricultural lands differ somewhat from the DOC definitions that are typically relied upon for CEQA analysis.

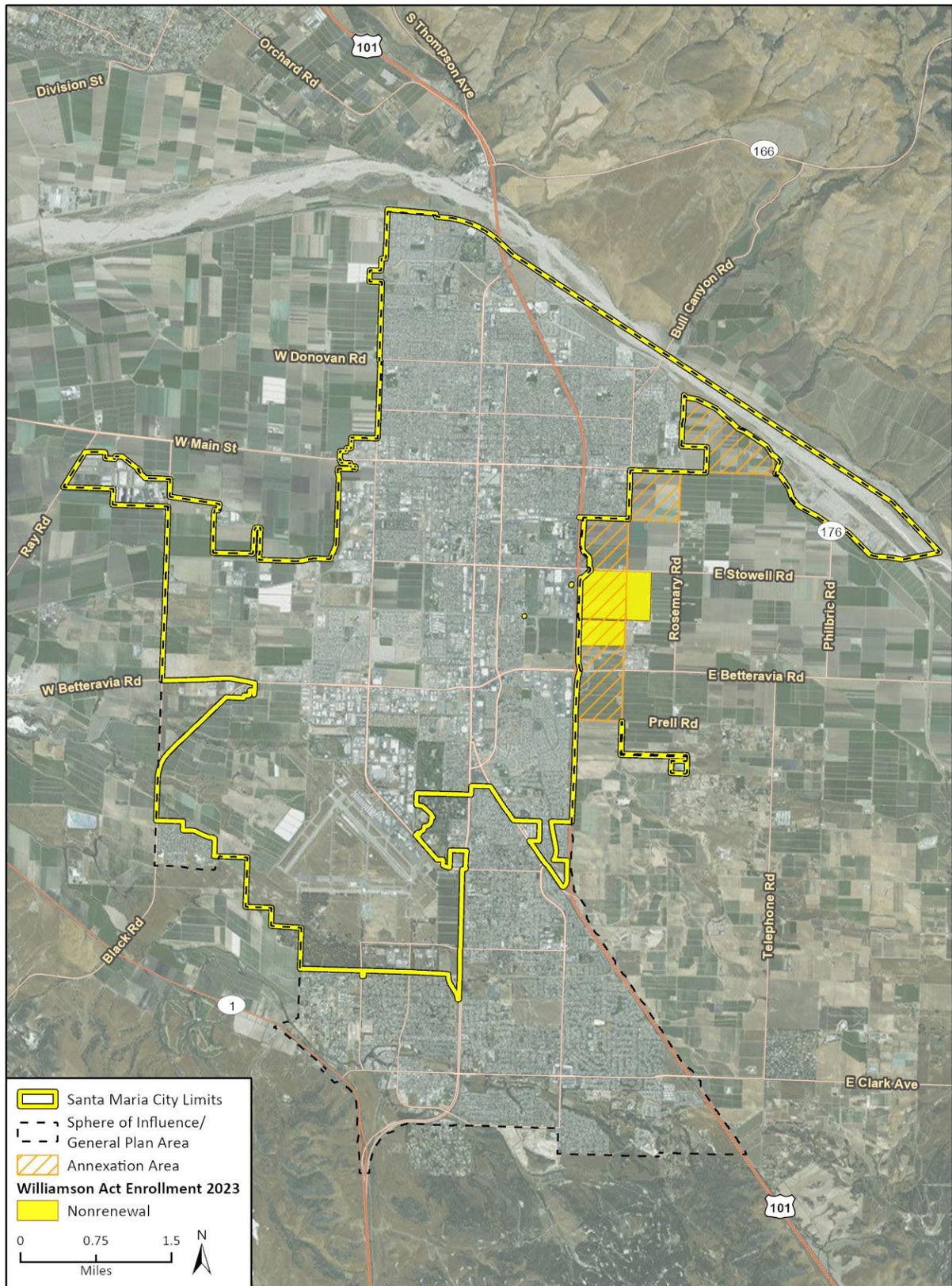
**Figure 4.1-1 Important Farmland in the Plan Area**



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 Additional data provided by FMMP, 2020.

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 Fig 4.1-1 Important Farmland In Plan Area

Figure 4.1-2 Williamson Act Lands in the Plan Area



Imagery provided by Esri and its licensors © 2025.  
 Additional data provided by CGS, 2023.

19-07303 EPS  
 Fig 4.1-2 Williamson Act in Plan Area

Land that would not qualify as Prime under USDA or FMMP definitions of Prime, may qualify as Prime under the LAFCO definition. For the proposed plan, the only land that this applies to is grazing land which meets the LAFCO definition of Prime agricultural land and is considered as Prime agricultural land within this analysis. As shown on Figure 4.1-1 and in Table 4.1-1, the plan area includes approximately 1,537 acres of grazing lands.

## **Regional Agriculture**

Agriculture is an important part of the economy in Santa Barbara County. In 2023, the total gross value of agricultural crops and products was \$1,875,978,000, which represents a 2.8 percent decrease, or \$54,467,000, compared to the 2022 value of \$1,930,455,000 (County of Santa Barbara 2024).

More specifically, agriculture has been a substantial part of Santa Maria's economy since the early 20th century, with the region's fertile soils and favorable climate supporting a variety of crops. The Santa Maria Valley is particularly known for its strawberries, which are a major contributor to the local economy. Other important crops include wine grapes, broccoli, and cauliflower, which benefit from the region's temperate climate and productive soils.

## **Regional Farmland Trends**

Conversion of farmland is the loss of farmlands due to development or land use changes that do not support agricultural production. The FMMP, which is updated biennially, provides land use conversion information for decision makers to use in their planning for the present and future of California's agricultural land resources.

According to the DOC, irrigated farmland in California showed a net decrease of 56,186 acres between 2016 and 2018, an amount substantially higher than between 2014 and 2016 (11,165 acres). Prime Farmland, the highest quality farmland, decreased by 38,683 net acres, coupled with a Farmland of Statewide Importance decrease of 30,052 net acres. Partially offsetting these losses was the addition of 12,549 net acres of irrigated crops on lesser quality soils (DOC 2019).

Irrigated land conversions due to idling are often associated with water resource limitations, market conditions, and salinity-related land idling. Land was removed from irrigated categories at a rate 19 percent lower than compared with the prior update (128,105 acres between 2014 and 2016 compared to 152,627 acres between 2016 and 2018) (DOC 2019).

Table 4.1-2 shows the number of acres of Important Farmland that have been converted in Santa Barbara County from 2016 to 2018, the most recent and granular data available. As shown, the county lost 2,712 acres of agricultural land and gained 3,789 acres, resulting in a net increase of 1,077 acres.

**Table 4.1-2 Farmland Conversion in Santa Barbara County**

<b>Farmland Designation</b>	<b>Total Acreage Inventoried 2016</b>	<b>Total Acreage Inventoried 2018</b>	<b>Total Acreage Inventoried Acres Lost (-)</b>	<b>Total Acreage Inventoried Acres Gained (+)</b>	<b>Total Acreage Inventoried Total Acreage Changed</b>	<b>Total Acreage Inventoried Net Acreage Changed</b>	<b>Percent of Inventoried Net Acreage Changed</b>
Prime Farmland	66,979	67,819	955	1,795	2,750	840	+1.2%
Farmland of Statewide Importance	13,194	13,648	151	605	756	454	+3.4%
Unique Farmland	37,324	37,710	715	1,101	1,816	366	+1%
Farmland of Local Importance	8,950	8,347	819	288	1,179	-603	-6.9%
<b>Important Farmland Subtotal</b>	<b>126,447</b>	<b>127,524</b>	<b>2,712</b>	<b>3,789</b>	<b>6,501</b>	<b>1,077</b>	<b>+0.8%</b>

Source: DOC 2021

### **c. Forestry Resources**

#### **Forest Land, Timberland, Timber Production Zones**

Forestry resources include forestland, timberland, and timberland production zones. Definitions used for forestland and timberland are those found in the California Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections 12220(g) and 4789.2(g) and California Government Code (CGC) Section 51104(g). These codes define forestland, timberland, and timberland production zones as follows:

1. **Forest Land** is land that can support, under natural conditions, 10 percent native tree cover of any species, including hardwoods, and that allows for the preservation or management of forest-related resources such as timber, aesthetic value, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, recreational facilities, and other public benefits (PRC Section 12220[g]).
2. **Timberland** means land, other than land owned by the federal government and land designated by the board as experimental forest land, which is available for, and capable of, growing a crop of trees of a commercial species used to produce lumber and other forest products, including Christmas trees. Commercial species are determined by the board on a district basis (PRC Section 4526[g]).
3. **Timberland Production Zones** or “TPZ” means an area which has been zoned pursuant to Section 51112 or 51113 and is devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses, as defined in subdivision (h) (CGC Section 51104).

Within the plan area, there are no official timberland, forest land, or TPZ zoning districts or land use designations. Several locations in the plan area are covered with many trees, including scattered open spaces and parks. However, these concentrations of trees would not be considered forestland or timberland.

## 4.1.2 Regulatory Setting

Various policies and regulations are enforced at the federal, state, and local level to protect agriculture, forestry, and timberland resources, as outlined below.

### **a. Federal Regulations**

#### **Farmland Protection Policy Act**

The Farmland Protection Policy Act is intended to minimize the impact federal programs have on the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses. It assures that to the extent possible federal programs are administered to be compatible with state, local units of government and private programs and policies to protect farmland. Projects are subject to Farmland Protection Policy Act requirements if they may irreversibly convert farmland (directly or indirectly) to nonagricultural use and are completed by a federal agency or with assistance from a federal agency.

### **b. State Regulations**

#### **Farmland Conservation Program Act**

The California Farmland Conservancy Program Act, also known as Senate Bill (SB) 1142, established the California Farmland Conservancy Program, which provides grants for agricultural conservation easements. An agricultural conservation easement aims to maintain agricultural land in active production by preventing development on the subject parcel and prohibiting practices that would damage or interfere with the agricultural use of the land. Because the easement is a restriction on the deed of the property, the easement remains in effect even when the land changes ownership. While other benefits may accrue because the land is not developed (scenic and habitat values, for example), the primary use of the land is agricultural. Easements funded by the California Farmland Conservancy Program must be of a size and nature suitable for viable commercial agriculture.

#### **Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program**

The DOC prepares, updates, and maintains Important Farmland Series Maps (Maps) as part of the FMMP and as defined in subdivision (f) of Section 65560 of the Government Code, and prepares and maintains an automated map and database system to record and report changes in the use of agricultural lands every two years on even numbered calendar years. Agricultural land is rated according to soil quality and irrigation status; the best quality land is called Prime Farmland. In preparing FMMP maps, the DOC considers all information collected or received on the amount of land converted to or from agricultural use, and between agricultural categories.

#### **Right to Farm Act 1981**

The Right to Farm Act (Civil Code Section 3482.5) is designed to protect commercial agricultural operations from nuisance complaints that may arise when an agricultural operation is conducting business in a “manner consistent with proper and accepted customs.” The code specifies that established operations that have been in business for 3 or more years that were not nuisances at the time they began shall not be considered a nuisance as a result of new land use.

## **Williamson Act**

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, Sections 51200 et seq. of the California Government Code, commonly referred to as the “Williamson Act,” enables local governments to restrict the use of specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use. Landowners enter into contracts with participating cities and counties and agree to restrict their land to agriculture or open space use for a minimum of 10 years. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments that are much lower than normal because they are based upon farming and open space uses as opposed to full market (speculative) value.

### **c. Local Regulations**

#### **Santa Maria Municipal Code**

The Santa Maria Municipal Code includes provisions for agricultural use, specifically outlined in Chapter 12-2.04A. This chapter defines agricultural use as farming or ranching activities, which encompass the cultivation and growing of crops, as well as the raising and keeping of poultry or livestock. These regulations ensure that agricultural activities are conducted in a manner that supports the city's goals for land use and development while maintaining the integrity of agricultural lands.

#### **City of Santa Maria Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves**

Santa Maria administers its Agricultural Preserve Program under the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly known as the Williamson Act. This program is designed to conserve agricultural and open space lands through uniform rules that govern Williamson Act contracts. The city's Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves establish the basic requirements for all contracts, ensuring long-term conservation of agricultural lands and promoting sustainable farming practices (City of Santa Maria 2025).

### **4.1.3 Impact Analysis**

#### **a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds**

##### **Methodology**

Agricultural and forestry impact assessments involved a review of data available through the Department of Conservation’s FMMP and Williamson Act Land maps. An adverse effect would occur if a proposed development would have an impact on existing, mapped agricultural or forest land.

##### **Significance Thresholds**

According to Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, impacts related to agricultural and forestry resources from implementation of the project would be significant if it would:

1. Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use
2. Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract

3. Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))
4. Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use
5. Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use

## **b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

<b>Threshold 1:</b> Would the project convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?
<b>Threshold 2:</b> Would the project conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract?
<b>Threshold 5:</b> Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

**Impact AG-1 LAND USE CHANGES IN THE ANNEXATION AREA HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO CONFLICT WITH EXISTING ZONING FOR AGRICULTURE. THERE ARE NO FEASIBLE MITIGATION MEASURES THAT WOULD AVOID OR FULLY MITIGATE FOR THE CONVERSION OF FARMLAND OR AGRICULTURALLY ZONED LANDS. AS A RESULT, THIS WOULD BE A SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE IMPACT.**

As noted in Table 4.1-1, the plan area (which includes the annexation area) contains approximately 5,116 acres of Important Farmland. Important Farmland (i.e., Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland) is mapped within City limits. There are nine acres of Grazing Land within the plan area which is considered Prime agricultural land by the LAFCO definition.

The plan emphasizes infill development in urbanized portions of the city. Infill development would generally limit agricultural resource impacts, since development would be located within existing urban areas. However, some future development, including development within the annexation area is anticipated in agricultural areas.

The California Department of Conservation currently lists several sites within the city as either Grazing Land, Prime Farmland, or Unique Farmland. However, these sites, ~~shown as important farmland in~~ **Error! Reference source not found.**, have previously undergone environmental review for the conversion of agricultural land.

The area west of A street and north of Betteravia Road was evaluated within the Sphere of Influence Expansion Environmental Impact Report (SCH #90010930) in 1994 and the Area 9 Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report (SCH #2008071018) in 2011 wherein impacts to agricultural resources were determined to be less than significant. The Environmental Impact Report for the City's Sphere of Influence Expansion (SCH#90010930) documented the conversion of these agricultural resources to non-agricultural uses, and the City Council Resolution No. 92-136 presented a Statement of Overriding Considerations, which the Council adopted on September 15, 1994. Santa Barbara LAFCO approved annexation of the project area to Santa Maria on November 23, 2004. Furthermore, in

order to mitigate the conversion of these agricultural resources, the City adopted a “Greenbelt and Urban Buffer” resolution in 1994 (Resolution 94- 9). The Greenbelt and Urban Buffer resolution established that the City would preserve agricultural and open space areas immediately adjacent to the City’s Urban Boundary Limit. This resolution protects agricultural and open space areas adjacent to the city by prohibiting the city from expanding its Urban Boundary Limit into such areas. As such, the areas immediately adjacent to the Area 9 Specific Plan area would be preserved under this resolution. Because the impacts of the conversion of these agricultural resources on the site were previously offset by the establishment of the City’s Greenbelt and Urban Buffer, impacts were found not to be significant (City of Santa Maria 2011). As such, conversion of the area known as Area 9 would not result in a significant impact to agricultural resources. Similarly, the area south of Main Street between Blosser Road and Hanson Way was evaluated within the Sphere of Influence Expansion Environmental Impact Report (SCH #90010930) in 1994. As part of the Sphere of Influence Expansion project, this area was assigned urban growth potentials as part of the West Main Specific Plan and did not include area identified for future agricultural use. Conversion of this area would not result in significant impacts as the area has been previously evaluated and slated for urban growth in previous environmental analyses.

The area east of South Blosser Road, south of West Stowell Road, and north of Battles Road was evaluated within the Blosser-Southeast Specific Plan Amendment Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SCH #1994107909) in 2020 wherein impacts to agricultural resources were determined to be less than significant. The Supplemental Environmental Impact Report determined that the Blosser-Southeast Specific Plan area has been anticipated for non-agricultural use, including residential development, since the evaluation of the City’s Sphere of Influence Boundary Amendment and Concurrent Annexation Program in 1992. As part of the Sphere of Influence Boundary Amendment and Concurrent Annexation Program, this area was assigned residential growth potentials and did not include area identified for future agricultural use. As such, conversion of this area would not result in a significant impact to agricultural resources.

The area east of Blosser Road and south of Battles Road was evaluated within the Betteravia Plaza General Plan Amendment, Land Use and Zone Change and Development Agreement Environmental Impact Report (SCH #2015011029) in 2015. Impacts to agricultural resources within this Environmental Impact Report were determined to be less than significant as this area was identified an infill site located within the urbanized city, surrounded by urban development and is planned and zoned for future urban development. Prior to the preparation of the Betteravia Plaza General Plan Amendment, Land Use and Zone Change and Development Agreement Environmental Impact Report (SCH #2015011029), an Initial Study – Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared for this area indicating the site had a land use designation of Light Industrial and a zoning designation of Light Manufacturing that has since been changed to allow for retail commercial and professional office uses. As the area has been designated for development and has been previously evaluated in previous environmental documents, impacts related to the conversion of agricultural land would be less than significant.

As such, future development adjacent to agricultural land would not lead to farmland loss due to potential conflicts between existing farming operations and new urban or non-agricultural uses. The 2045 General Plan Update would result in less than significant impacts as it would not result in the conversion of farmland to non—agricultural uses that have not already been evaluated in previous environmental documents and would not result in conflicting uses introduced adjacent to existing farmland.

In addition to Important Farmland, the plan area contains three properties that are under Williamson Act contracts within the central portion of the proposed annexation area. As shown in Figure 4.1-2, these lands are currently in nonrenewal, which starts a countdown to the expiration of the contract. The contracts will expire on January 1, 2026 (71AP072), January 1, 2027 (85AP008), and January 1, 2028 (70AP148). During the non-renewal period, the land remains subject to all the restrictions and benefits of the Williamson Act contract until it fully expires. At the end of the nonrenewal process, the contract will be terminated and the land will no longer be under contract as Williamson Act land. As discussed within Chapter 2, *Project Description*, land use changes for the annexation area would include the establishment of a new land use designation, Planned Annexation, which would allow for a mix of commercial, residential, industrial, and public land uses in annexed land outside of current city limits. This could conflict with the existing Williamson Act contracts. However, as these lands are currently within nonrenewal and are set to expire, it is anticipated that the contracts will have expired by the time of plan buildout thereby reducing the likelihood of a direct conflict at the time of buildout. Further, development facilitated by the plan that would occur within Williamson Act land would be required to undergo individual environmental review at the time a project is proposed for both the proposed project and the annexation of the area. As it is not reasonably foreseeable for new discretionary development in the annexation area to be proposed, reviewed, and approved, between the date of publication of this EIR and the expiration date of the current remaining Williamson Act contracts in the annexation area, development facilitated by the plan would not result in the conversion of Williamson Act Lands. Impacts related to the conversion of Williamson Act lands would be less than significant.

The Conservation and Open Space Element and the Land Use Element of the plan seeks to encourage the continued operation of agricultural lands in and around Santa Maria. The goals and policies listed below from the General Plan address the preservation of agricultural lands:

**Goal COS-2: Working lands.** Sustainable and productive working lands support healthy local ecosystems.

**Policy COS-2.1: Agricultural preservation.** Collaborate with Santa Barbara County and local landowners to preserve existing agricultural uses on lands not proposed for future development, including croplands and rangelands.

**Action COS-2.1.1:** During review of projects that would alter or convert existing agricultural uses, balance state and regional efforts to preserve existing agricultural uses, including the Santa Barbara County Right to Farm Ordinance, clustering of urban land uses/development, and transfer of development rights —with other factors. These include providing adequate housing, achieving a jobs-housing balance, supporting economic sustainability, and advancing other City interests.

**Action COS-2.1.2:** To the extent feasible, support the establishment of agricultural conservation easements on land within the City's Sphere of Influence that is zoned for agriculture and designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland by initiating discussions with property owners on eligible sites and providing education and technical assistance to interested owners.

**Goal LU-1: Balanced mix of uses.** A balanced mix of land uses meets the present and future housing, employment, and recreation needs of the community.

**Policy LU-1.2: Infill development.** ~~Prioritize the redevelopment of vacant or underutilized parcels with a focus on infill of existing residential, commercial, and industrial capacity to revitalize downtown and deteriorating neighborhoods, to the extent feasible. Accommodate growth while making every effort to preserve agricultural lands and open space.~~

**Goal LU-2: Annexation as outward growth.** Santa Maria expands in an orderly and efficient manner to accommodate future growth.

**Policy LU-2.1: Planned Annexation Area.** Expand Sphere of Influence and annex the Planned Annexation Areas identified on the General Plan Land Use Map to meet housing and jobs development goals.

**Goal LU-9: Agricultural areas.** Thriving agricultural lands generate fresh produce for the State and preserve Santa Maria's history as a farming community.

**Policy LU-9.1: Agricultural resources.** ~~Accommodate future city growth while making every feasible effort to~~ Preserve agricultural resources in the city on land not proposed for future development, specifically those with State or local importance. Annexation into areas utilized for agriculture shall occur in an orderly and planned manner, consistent with the General Plan and LAFCO policies.

**Policy LU-9.2: Agricultural land use conflicts.** Support ongoing agricultural activities by discouraging land uses that conflict with adjacent farming activities.

**Policy LU-9.3: Agricultural buffers.** Update the Municipal Code to require buffers between new development and ~~lands designated for active~~ agricultural uses. Examples of buffers include but are not limited to roadways, stormwater basins, and landscaped or open space areas.

**Policy LU-9.4: Agricultural land impact avoidance and minimization.** Require projects adjacent to agricultural land to prevent the spread of invasive plant species during construction.

A determination of the impacts to Important Farmland, agricultural zoning and conflicts with Williamson Act contracts would be made on a case-by-case basis as individual projects are proposed. A majority of development facilitated by the plan would likely not create significant impacts, particularly for development that would be located in urbanized areas of the city. However, because implementation of the plan would allow for future conversion of Important Farmland and conflict with agricultural zoning within the annexation area, impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

## Mitigation Measures

The 2045 General Plan Update includes policies which are intended to minimize future impacts to agricultural lands in and around Santa Maria. However, there is no set of General Plan policies or mitigation measures that could feasibly reduce the identified impact to agricultural lands in the annexation area.

## Significance After Mitigation

Policies included in the 2045 General Plan Update would reduce potential adverse impacts related to the conversion of Important Farmland and Williamson Act contract lands within the annexation area to the extent feasible through preservation efforts and by requiring conservation easements. Nonetheless, even with compliance with General Plan actions, conversion of Important Farmland and conflicts with agricultural zoning could still occur. While these policies would help reduce the extent of farmland conversion and conflicts with agricultural zoning in the annexation area to the extent feasible, it would not be guaranteed that development facilitated by the plan would avoid or fully mitigate for the conversion of Farmland and agriculturally zoned lands within the annexation area. As a result, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable.

**Threshold 3:** Would the project conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g)); timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526); or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g))?

**Threshold 4:** Would the project result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

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### **Impact AG-2 THE 2045 GENERAL PLAN UPDATE WOULD NOT CONFLICT WITH EXISTING ZONING FOR FOREST LAND, TIMBERLAND, OR TIMBERLAND PRODUCTION, NOR RESULT IN THE LOSS OF FOREST LAND OR CONVERT FOREST LAND TO NON-FOREST USES. THERE WOULD BE NO IMPACT.**

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As discussed above in Section 4.1.1(b), there are no zoned TPZs or forest lands within the plan area. Accordingly, the proposed land use pattern would not result in rezoning of any existing forest land or timberlands within the plan area. Because no forest land or timber areas are within the plan area, there would be no impact on conversion of forest land or conflicts with land zoned for forest land, timberland, or timberland production.

## Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is required because there would be no impact.

### 4.1.4 Cumulative Impacts

A project's environmental impacts are "cumulatively considerable" if the "incremental effects of an individual project are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects" (CEQA Guidelines Section 15065[a][3]). A project's environmental impacts are "cumulatively considerable" if the "incremental effects of an individual project are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects" (CEQA Guidelines Section 15065[a][3]). Regional cumulative impacts consider the City-wide impacts together with similar impacts of reasonably anticipated regional projects/programs. The general approach to cumulative impact analysis used in this EIR, as well as the determination of the cumulative impact analysis area, is discussed in Section 3, Environmental Setting, Subsection 3.3, Cumulative Development.

Since the mid-20th century, the Santa Maria region has experienced steady urban expansion resulting in Important Farmland being incrementally converted to residential, commercial, and industrial uses (DOC 2015). This trend has been especially pronounced in areas surrounding Santa

Maria, where population growth and housing demand have led to the conversion of prime farmland. Future development within the cumulative impact analysis area would convert agricultural land to non-agricultural uses and may result in conflicts with agricultural zoning and Williamson Act contracts. In addition, future development adjacent to agricultural land has the potential to result in a loss of farmland due to land use conflicts between existing agricultural activities and new non-agricultural development, which adds to the cumulative conversion of agricultural lands, including areas designated as Important Farmland by the FMMP. Cumulative impacts to agricultural resources would be significant.

As identified in Impact AG-1, the 2045 General Plan Update would result in conversion of agricultural lands to non-agricultural use and could conflict with agricultural zoning in the annexation area. Development facilitated by the plan could result in incompatibilities between new residences and adjacent agricultural uses resulting in the potential conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses. Implementation of 2045 General Plan policies would reduce the contribution of the plan to cumulative agricultural land impacts. However, these actions would not ensure that the future development facilitated by the plan in the annexation area could feasibly relocate or realign to avoid impacts, and impacts would remain significant and unavoidable. Therefore, cumulative impacts to agricultural resources would be significant, and the 2045 General Plan Update would have a cumulatively considerable contribution on agricultural resource impacts.

Because there is no forestland within the plan area or immediately adjacent areas, future development within the cumulative impact analysis area would not convert forestland to non-forest uses and thus, would not result in conflicts forest zoning. Cumulative impacts to forestland and timber resources would be less than significant.