

5.1 - AGRICULTURE

5.1.1 - Introduction

Information in this section is based upon the following documents and correspondence received on the Notice of Preparation:

- NMC Final EIR, City of Ontario, 1997. This document is incorporated by reference.
- Letter from the State of California, Department of Conservation, June 2004. This letter is contained in Appendix A of the Technical Appendices.

The NMC Final EIR prepared for the NMC evaluated the potential impacts to prime agricultural land and to agricultural productivity that would result from the full and complete build-out of the NMC pursuant to the General Plan Amendment. The NMC Final EIR concluded that the conversion of agricultural uses to urban uses within the NMC would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to agriculture.

Preparation of this section of the DEIR is intended to document the existing conditions on the project site and evaluate additional information specific to the project site that may not have been included in the broad, program-level evaluation of the NMC Final EIR. Based upon correspondence received from the California Department of Land Conservation, the evaluation of potential impacts to agricultural land and agricultural uses will use the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (LESA). A description of the LESA model and its application to the project site is provided in Section 5.1.4.

5.1.2 - Existing Conditions

Regional Agricultural Conditions

According to the 2003 Crop and Livestock Report (San Bernardino County 2004), San Bernardino County's top ten commodities had a combined valuation of \$593,525,800. The top ten agricultural products by valuation, including the percent of total valuation, include the following by rank order:

- Milk (58.5%)
- Cattle and Calves (meat) (8.1%)
- Replacement Heifers (6.2%)
- Eggs (6.0%)
- Indoor Decoratives (4.1%)
- Trees and Shrubs (3.4%)
- Oranges (2.4%)

- Alfalfa (1.5%)
- Bok Choi (0.9%)
- Chickens (0.8%)

The same report identified San Bernardino County as having a total 1,632, 056 acres dedicated to agriculture. Following are commodity groups and their respective acreages. As a matter of note, the report does not identify acreages for the Livestock and Poultry commodity group.

- Field Crops (1,620,196 Ac.)
- Fruit and Nut Crops (6,170 Ac.)
- Vegetable Crops (4,614 Ac.)
- Nursery Products (1,055 Ac.)

The 2003 Crop and Livestock Report identified a total of 165 dairies as of January 1, 2004, down from a total of 180 dairies identified on January 1, 2003. Despite the decrease in dairies, the dairy herd increased from 219,267 in January of 2001 to 223,482 in January of 2004. However, this one-year increase reverses a trend in steadily decreasing dairy herds from an all-time high of approximately 190,000 in 1997.

The estimated value of the dairy crop (milk and milk by-products) within the Chino Basin is approximately \$0.75 billion dollars. The total economic value from the dairy industry approaches \$1 billion.

Field crops slightly increased in acres harvested from 1,620,196 acres in 2003 from 1,618,698 acres in 2002. Fruit and nut crops decreased in acres harvested to 6,170 acres in 2003 from 7,580 acres in 2002. Vegetable crops decreased in acres harvested to 4,614 acres in 2003 from 5,497 acres in 2002. Nursery products decreased in acres to 1,055 acres in 2003 from 1,070 acres in 2002. As previously stated, livestock and poultry are not reported in acres harvested.

The NMC Final EIR indicated the economic vitality of agriculture in the NMC and Southern California has declined in direct response to increased urbanization pressures that convert agricultural land to urban uses. This trend is anticipated to continue due to continued urbanization of Southern California land and increased competition from other regions within the State, most notably the San Joaquin Valley, and other states located in the Western United States.

NMC Agricultural Conditions

The NMC Final EIR identified agriculture as accounting for 7,328 acres representing approximately 89 percent of the entire NMC (8,200 acres). This agricultural land includes dairies, poultry, cultivated crops, fallow cropland, and nurseries. Approximately half of this acreage is devoted to dairy and poultry operations.

Project Site Agricultural Conditions

Portions of the project site are used for agricultural production. The western portion of the project site is developed as a dairy (approximately 40 acres) and portions of the remainder of the project site are used for cultivated row crop production consisting of alfalfa and barley (approximately 55 acres) and a nursery (approximately 25 acres) (see Exhibit 5.1-1). According to Section 5.2.1 of the NMC Final EIR, the nursery is considered to be an agricultural use.

Relevant Policy

The City's Agricultural Overlay Zoning District, Section 9-1.2700 of the Ontario Municipal Code, allows for the continuation of agricultural uses on an interim basis until such time as development is proposed for individual NMC subareas.

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly referred to as the Williamson Act, enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use.

The western half of the project site was previously enrolled in a Williamson Contract. A Notice of Non-renewal was filed in 1992. The notice of non-renewal time period has lapsed and no portions of the project site remain under a Williamson Act Contract.

State Farmland Mapping Program

The California Department of Conservation (CDC) established the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) in 1982. The FMMP is a non-regulatory program and provides a consistent and impartial analysis of agricultural land use and land use changes throughout California. The FMMP produces maps and statistical data used for analyzing impacts on California's agricultural resources. Agricultural land is rated according to soil quality and irrigation status and identified by the following categories, collectively referred to as Farmland: Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Farmland of Local Importance. Table 5.1-1 provides a summary of these categories on the project site according to the Chino, San Bernardino County Important Farmland Map that was produced by the FMMP.



Project Site Boundary

Source: Brookfield Homes



NOT TO SCALE

Michael Brandman Associates

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Exhibit 5.1-1 Existing Land Use

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Table 5.1-1: Project Site Farmland Categories

Use	Acreage
Prime Farmland	71.0
Unique Farmland	11.1
Farmland of Statewide Importance	0.0
Farmland of Local Importance	0.0
Other land	49.3
Urban or built-up	29.2
Total	160.6
Source: State of California, Department of Conservation, Chino, San Bernardino County Important Farmland Map, and Michael Brandman Associates, 2004.	

5.1.3 - Thresholds of Significance

According to Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, a project would normally have a significant effect on the environment if it would:

- 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;
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act Contract; or
- Involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use.

Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines provides for an alternative evaluation technique for assessing potential impacts to agricultural resources by the use of the LESA Model, previously referenced, prepared by the California Department of Conservation.

5.1.4 - Project Impacts

The proposed project would convert the existing agricultural land and agricultural uses located on the project site to non-agricultural uses. This would result in the conversion of 82.1 acres of land that is considered either Prime Farmland or Unique Farmland to urban uses, which is considered a significant impact on Farmland and agricultural resources. Following is a discussion of the project impacts based on the LESA Model.

Impacts Related to Conversion of Farmland and Agricultural Uses

The LESA Model is composed of six different factors, which evaluate the land and the project site. Two Land Evaluation factors are based upon measures of soil resource quality. Four Site Assessment factors provide measures of a project site's size, water resource availability, surrounding agricultural lands, and surrounding protected resource lands intended to measure social, economic, and geographic attributes that contribute to the overall value of agricultural land. The factors used in the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment follow:

Land Evaluation

- Land Capability Classification; and
- Storie Index.

Site Assessment

The four factors in the LESA model that are used in the scoring criteria are:

- Project Size Rating;
- Water Resources Availability Rating;
- Surrounding Agricultural Land Rating; and
- Surrounding Protected Resource Land Rating.

For a proposed project, each of these factors is separately rated on a 100-point scale. A single LESA score is generated for a given project after all of the individual Land Evaluation Factors and Site Assessment factors have been scored and weighted. The factors are then weighted relative to one another and combined, resulting in a single numeric score for a given project, with a maximum attainable score of 100 points. It is this project score that becomes the basis for making a determination of a project's potential significance, based upon a range of established scoring thresholds. According to the LESA Model, a project would result in a significant impact on agricultural resources if it meets the criteria specified in Table 9 of the LESA Manual. Table 5.1-2 provides the ratings that determine if a project will result in a significant impact to Farmland.

Table 5.1-2: LESA Significance Ratings

Total LESA Score	Scoring Decision
0 to 39 points	Not considered significant
40 to 59 points	Considered significant only if LE and SA sub-scores are each greater than or equal to 20 points
60 to 79 points	Considered significant unless either LE or SA sub-scores are each less than 20 points
80 to 100 points	Considered Significant
Source: California Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (LESA), Table 9, California Department of Conservation, 1997.	

An overview of the six different factors and the worksheets for the proposed project are contained in Appendix I of the Technical Appendices Volume.

Therefore, based on the evaluation in the LESA worksheets, the final score for the proposed project is 66.6 points out of a possible 100 points. Neither of the scores associated with the Land Evaluation factors or the Site Assessment factors were below the referenced threshold of 20 points. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would have a significant impact on Farmland and agricultural resources.

Impacts Related to Conflicts with Agricultural Zoning or Williamson Act Contracts

When the city annexed all of the land within the NMC, it was zoned as Specific Plan, which included the project site. However, at the same time, the City adopted the Agricultural Overlay Zoning District, or a “right-to-farm” ordinance, that would allow existing agricultural uses within the NMC to continue until such time as specific development proposals were submitted. The continued operation of the dairy and nursery, until such time as the residential component begins construction, is consistent with this ordinance. In addition, the continued use of the other portions of the project site for cultivated row crop production and a nursery until such time as development proposals for the commercial component are submitted are also consistent with this ordinance.

There are no Williamson Act contracts for any land on the project site.

Therefore, impacts related to conflicts with existing zoning or Williamson Act contracts would not result from project implementation.

Impacts Related to Changes in the Existing Environment

As previously stated, the NMC Final EIR concluded that build-out of the NMC would result in conversion of virtually all of the existing agricultural land to urban uses; a small portion

(approximately 200 acres) of the NMC, known as the Southern California Agricultural Land Foundation (SoCALF) properties, would be dedicated to agricultural uses. Because land in the project site is located within the NMC, which is planned for urban development and because the vicinity of the project site has begun this conversion to urban uses, the City's adoption and implementation of the NMC anticipates the conversion of the project site from agricultural uses to urban uses and would not result in the conversion of Farmland not previously identified in the NMC Final EIR.

Therefore, no impacts related to the conversion of Farmland from other changes in the environment would occur.

5.1.5 - Cumulative Impacts

Future planned urban development in the NMC and the region is anticipated to result in the conversion of agricultural uses to non-agricultural uses that would substantially reduce agricultural productivity. The proposed Edenglen Project would have a cumulative impact related to the reduction of agricultural productivity within the region.

Information provided in the NMC Final EIR states that agricultural productivity within the NMC, particularly with respect to dairies, would decline over time as a result of competition from other regions in the State and from out of state, and from increased urbanization of agricultural lands. Loss of agricultural productivity within the NMC is attributable not only to conversion of agricultural lands, but also to a continuation of existing trends. The NMC Final EIR reported on a 1995 study (Dairy Farm Operating Trends) that Southern California dairies had the lowest net income based on average amounts per hundredweight of milk and average amounts on a per head basis of the study areas included in the report. The report included the San Joaquin Valley and areas in Arizona, New Mexico, and Idaho. The study also indicated that Southern California dairies had the lowest net income due to increases in operating costs, particularly related to feed, without a corresponding increase in price. In addition, recently adopted requirements from the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board require stormwater retention and control of drainage, and reductions in the amount of manure that can be stockpiled. This trend is anticipated to continue and accelerate as a result of the combination of this trend and the increase in urbanization. This trend is shown in the 2003 Crop and Livestock Report where it is reported that fifteen dairies have closed between January 1, 2003 and January 1, 2004. This trend is identified in the Planning Issues - Agriculture section of the Community Development chapter of the NMC General Plan where it states: "Many dairy operations in the Sphere of Influence [NMC] have difficulty competing with dairies in the California Central Valley and with dairies in other states because of high operating costs, including high feed costs and the cost of manure disposal. Given this, many of the dairies owners/operators will consider relocation."

The productivity of other types of agriculture such as cultivated crops, grazing, and poultry on prime and non-prime agricultural lands would also be lost.

In addition to the NMC, future planned urban development in the City of Chino and in Riverside County is also anticipated to result in the conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses, which would substantially reduce agricultural productivity.

This conversion corresponds with the projected decline in long-term agricultural productivity on the project site and within the NMC.

According to the NMC Final EIR, the only prime agricultural land in the NMC that will not be converted to non-agricultural use is the Southern California Agricultural Land Foundation (SoCALF) properties, which total approximately 200 acres. The project site is not one of the SoCALF properties.

5.1.6 - Mitigation Measures

The NMC Final EIR did not include any mitigation measures for the conversion of prime agricultural land to non-agricultural uses or include any mitigation measures that would avoid the impacts related to agricultural productivity.

The NMC Final EIR did discuss the consolidation and preservation of the SoCALF properties to provide permanent retention of agricultural uses. However, due to their limited size (approximately 200 acres), they are not sufficient to provide mitigation for the conversion of agricultural land and uses on the project site or for the regional conversion of agricultural lands.

The City's Agricultural Overlay Zoning District, previously described in this section, would allow for continuation of similar agricultural uses (dairy and row crops) on portions of the property not immediately planned for development, considered to be the eastern half of the project site. However, continued agricultural production on the project site would be expected to be an interim use and would not provide mitigation for the expected conversion of agricultural land and agricultural uses on the project site or for the regional conversion of agricultural lands.

The potential to provide on-site mitigation for the loss of prime agricultural land and the existing agricultural uses was considered, but rejected as infeasible for several reasons. First, because approximately half of the project site is considered either Prime Farmland or Unique Farmland, which is not evenly distributed across the project site, and because most of the project site is used for agricultural production, the only feasible on-site mitigation would be avoidance (i.e., to not

implement the proposed project). However, this is infeasible because of the inconsistency with the NMC General Plan designations for the project site and the effect this would have on the overall implementation of the NMC. Development of the NMC is based upon general plan designations within thirty discrete planning subareas that are integrated and form a cohesive fabric of development. Should one of these subareas depart significantly from the land uses that would be allowed under the general plan, a domino effect of potential environmental effects could result, such as the balance between jobs and housing. Second, retaining a portion of the project site for similar agricultural uses to those that currently exist on the project site would also be infeasible. Due to the reasons previously described, partial retention would not fully mitigate the impact resulting from project implementation. Another reason this is infeasible would be from the inevitable land use conflicts that would occur, due to the adjacent development, which would include the proposed adjacent dwelling units and existing Colony High School located immediately west of the project site. Third, agricultural in the region continues to decline in economic viability due to escalating land prices, environmental regulations, high water costs, increasing labor costs, competition from other regions in California and from other states. The NMC Final EIR stated that the future loss of agricultural productivity within the NMC is not solely the result of the proposed urbanization of the NMC. Therefore, agricultural uses on small acreages, such as portion of the project site, would likely be, or quickly become, not economically viable.

The potential to provide off-site mitigation for the loss of agricultural land and agricultural uses were considered, but rejected as infeasible. Using one of the other NMC planning subareas as mitigation for impacts related to the project site would result in virtually the same issues as previously described in consideration of on-site mitigation. Therefore, similar to the reasons why on-site mitigation is not feasible, off-site mitigation within the NMC is also infeasible. In addition, off-site mitigation within the region is also considered infeasible due to the decreasing economic vitality of agriculture in the NMC and Southern California and increased urbanization pressures on existing agricultural lands.

Therefore, no feasible on-site or off-site mitigation measures exist.

5.1.7 - Level of Significance After Mitigation

Implementation of the proposed project would accelerate the conversion of agricultural lands and agricultural uses within the NMC and in the region. The loss of agricultural lands is considered significant on the project site and also considered cumulatively considerable from a regional perspective.