



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-23-129
Meeting 23-31
November 1, 2023

AGENDA ITEM 1

AGENDA ITEM

Proposed New Agricultural Policy

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a new Agricultural Policy to complement existing policies and replace the Agricultural Use Statements (1978) to guide agricultural conservation partnerships and land management actions.

SUMMARY

The proposed Agricultural Policy (Ag Policy) is aligned with the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) mission and purpose and serves to clarify the District's role in agricultural land conservation within the region and guides its agricultural partnership work and management of District agricultural lands. Development of the Ag Policy entailed extensive and broad outreach to District partners and stakeholders to solicit input, including multiple stakeholder meetings, an online survey, an Agricultural Producer's workshop, presentations at numerous San Mateo County Advisory Committee meetings, as well as District staff holding office hours at the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD) offices in Half Moon Bay, CA. The Ag Policy further defines and clarifies the District's role on the San Mateo Coastside region and remains consistent with the Service Plan for the San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area (Coastal Service Plan), where the majority of the District's agricultural lands are located. The Ag Policy would guide land management throughout all District open space lands within Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz Counties.

BACKGROUND

The work to develop an inclusive Agricultural Policy for the District began in 2019 with a review of existing agricultural uses on District lands and District policy and guidelines pertinent to the District's role in agricultural preservation. Central to the Ag Policy development has been ensuring consistency with the Coastal Service Plan while also delivering on commitments identified in that document for working with partners in delivering agricultural conservation projects on the San Mateo County coast. Below is a list of the various policies and plans reviewed in the process of developing the Ag Policy:

- **Basic Policy** (*adopted 1999, revised 2008*)
- **Agricultural Use Policy Statements** (*adopted 1978*)
- **Service Plan for the Coastal Annexation Area** (*adopted 2004*)
- **Resource Management Policies** (*first adoption 1994, revised/adopted 2012, revised 2022*)

- **Integrated Pest Management Program Guidance Manual (2014)**
- **Open Space Vision Plan (Vision Plan priorities adopted 2014)**
- **Board Policy 4.01** Open Space Use and Management Planning Process (*adopted 1977, revised 2013*)
- **Board Policy 4.02** Improvements to District Lands (*adopted 1978, revised 2017*)
- **Board Policy 4.11** Housing Policy (*adopted 2017*)

Relevant sections of these documents are summarized and presented with more detail in Attachment 1. The Basic Policy, Agricultural Use Policy Statements, Resource Management Policies, Vision Plan, and other Board-adopted policies together have been guiding the management of agricultural resources and uses on District properties. The San Mateo Coastal Service Plan and associated Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which were adopted as part of the Coastal Annexation Process, establish the policies, guidelines, and practices by which the District purchases agricultural lands and manages agricultural uses specifically within the San Mateo County coastside area to ensure compatibility with ongoing agricultural activities. Significantly, the Service Plan establishes an expanded mission statement for the Coastal Area that includes agricultural conservation goals:

“To acquire and preserve in perpetuity open space land and agricultural land of regional significance, protect and restore the natural environment, preserve rural character, encourage viable agricultural use of land resources, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.”

Staff returned to the Board of Directors (Board) with a summary of the District’s current agricultural role and scope of actions at a December 2021 study session, where the Board affirmed its support for continuing within the current agricultural conservation model and approved exploring opportunities for expanding District partnerships with the agricultural community. Based on Board feedback, this expanded role could include funding partners who take the lead in preserving intensive agricultural lands that protect rural character and open space values, working with partners to support farm worker housing, exploring opportunities to promote sustainable agricultural practices, and supporting the viability of agriculture on District lands as new challenges arise.

In addition to Board meetings on the Agricultural Policy, numerous meetings and other outreach efforts were held with partners and stakeholders to inform and develop an Ag Policy that implements the District’s coastal mission, supports the work of partners working to conserve agricultural lands, and provides for compatible agricultural uses on District lands.

Outreach to Partners, Stakeholders, and Community

Development of the Agricultural Policy has involved extensive stakeholder outreach and dialogue. Prior to development of the draft language, the District held a workshop with partner agencies from around the bay area and a second workshop focused on San Mateo agricultural producers. Staff also held office hours on the San Mateo County coast to be available for drop-in questions or comments from community members and held meetings with fourteen (14) individual groups involved in agriculture in San Mateo County, including:

- Ayudando Latinos a Sonar (ALAS)
- Conservation Council
- Farm Worker Affairs Coalition
- Farm Worker Advisory Commission
- Pescadero Municipal Advisory Committee
- Puente de la Costa Sur
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- San Mateo Agricultural Advisory Committee
- San Mateo Food Systems Alliance
- San Mateo Resource Conservation District
- San Mateo County Farm Bureau
- Sustainable Pescadero
- Peninsula Open Space Trust
- San Mateo County Agricultural Commissioner

During this outreach effort, staff also circulated a survey to gather input on the policy development. Details on feedback from these efforts are reviewed in the September 28, 2022 Board Report and associated Attachments ([R-22-105](#)).

On December 8, 2022, the Board received a status update of the policy development work and a working draft of the Agricultural Policy. At this meeting, the Board directed staff to conduct additional outreach to partners and stakeholders. In addition, the Board formed an Ad Hoc Committee to work with staff on incorporating the second round of Board and public input to finalize the policy draft. This effort included meetings with each of the local stakeholder groups who were contacted earlier during development of the policy framework and solicitation of feedback from the agencies involved in the peer agency workshop. Feedback from these groups typically included requests for clarification, general feedback about the District, implementation level comments, as well as policy level comments.

A summary of the pertinent feedback related to the Ag Policy is outlined below and covered in more detail in Attachment 4.

- The policy should be flexible to accommodate changing agricultural technologies and practices as they arise.
- Data/information from research or monitoring needs to be communicated back to the agricultural tenants.
- Farm workers need to be able to become farmers to improve equity and sustainability in the agricultural sector.
- The housing need for farm workers is a critical aspect of agricultural preservation and the vitality of agricultural communities and is also a major social justice and equity issue.
- Having housing options for farm workers that are independent of their employers is important.
- Policies around agricultural practices are very important, but it is also important to include efforts for protecting and restoring the environment. These should be integrated and include the people who are working the land.
- The policy should address how the District will balance agricultural land use and public access.
- Emphasize cultural landscape, community, and history.
- Clarify the terms “local” and “regional” in terms of housing needs. Emphasis should be on support for local agricultural housing.
- Clarify the term “viable agricultural use” and consider how changes in technology or resource availability might change how we interpret viable agricultural use.

- There is a need for education to raise awareness of the importance of agricultural communities and challenges to them.
- Consider how the District can help support agricultural communities beyond the lands the District owns (i.e., other businesses and services that are vital to the agricultural community).
- It is important for agricultural producers to have leases long enough to see a return on investments and be eligible for some assistance programs (at least 5 years).
- Include more discussion on land tenure and other challenges to farmers in the region.
- Highlight the value of agricultural lands to the function of regional wildlife corridors.
- Consider the implications of local agricultural preservation for food security and greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

Feedback received from the community and stakeholders has been invaluable in developing the Ag Policy. Staff has reviewed the feedback with the Ad Hoc Committee and addressed comments in the policy language while maintaining consistency with existing District policies and the agency's mission.

DISCUSSION

Since the early development of the policy framework, the Ag Policy has been informed by extensive stakeholder input. There was an intentional effort to expand input beyond traditional stakeholders, such as the San Mateo County Farm Bureau and tenants, to include advocates for farm labor, local community members/residents, and other agricultural producers. Some components of the policy were particularly informed by stakeholder input. Policy language on the lease structure and competition for leases was of particular interest with varying viewpoints. The proposed policy reflects input for a flexible term length for different types of operations, with long enough terms to encourage tenant investment while still providing opportunities for competition by new potential operators. In addition to the basic qualifications of knowledge and experience, the policy adds additional criteria for tenant selection for: local operators; diversity, equity and inclusion; tenant in good standing; and use of sustainable practices. While not unanimous, there was broad support for expanded farm worker housing. The proposed policy supports both interest in offsite housing expressed by farm labor and onsite housing supported by many agricultural operators.

Policy elements regarding leases and housing received the highest level of public interest and input. Other policy elements that were also influenced by stakeholder input include:

- Promoting the value of local agriculture and environmental benefits;
- Recognizing that all projects have some impact and that the District may want to support some infrastructure projects that are key to agricultural viability despite some level of natural resource impact.
- Public access closures to allow for timed agricultural activities;
- Keeping agricultural operations on contiguous properties under one lease;
- Working with agriculture operators to minimize public access impacts on agricultural operations;
- Ensuring lease competition is also open and available to farm workers and new prospective operators; and

- Supporting agricultural sustainability partnership projects on private lands that provide natural resource benefits.

The District's proposed Ag Policy has emerged with the Ad Hoc Committee's guidance, seeking to balance the private economic interests and viability of agricultural producers with the natural resource conservation, agricultural preservation, and open space goals of the District's mission. The policy reaffirms the District's current role to continue preserving and protecting upland grazing lands as an essential component of San Mateo County agriculture, managed within the conservation grazing program to protect grassland habitats, reduce wildfire risk/fuels, protect rural character, and support local agriculture. The proposed policy also provides a framework for supporting sustainable agricultural practices and guides how the District may support the work of partners to further other agricultural interests (including the preservation of intensive agricultural lands and development of agricultural workforce housing) when these efforts are also aligned with District goals.

The proposed Ag Policy (Attachments 2 and 3) consists of a Background section, followed by Goals, Policies, and Implementation Measures. The Background section provides the rationale for the agricultural goals and policies that follow. Each goal is phrased as a broad, general statement describing the desired state or condition to be achieved. The policies under each goal state what steps the District will take in order to attain that goal. Individual policy statements are numbered and include one or more recommended implementation measures. Implementation measures specify the action items that the District will strive to carry out when applying the policies to the landscape. Reference citations are provided that point to pertinent policies or other District guidance documents (e.g., Coastal Service Plan) where applicable. Informational sidebars identify current knowledge and practices regarding agricultural conservation. Keywords are noted in bold and definitions for each are found in the accompanying Glossary.

The proposed Agricultural Policy reflects the general framework presented at the Board's September 2022 meeting. The Ag Policy is organized into the following 13 Policy Areas, which are grouped under three main goals:

- **Goal AG-1** Preserve and foster existing and potential agricultural operations within the Coastside Protection Area
 - Policy AG-1: Agricultural Land Protection
 - Policy AG-2: Public Access
 - Policy AG-3: Agricultural Housing
 - Policy AG-4: Agricultural Infrastructure
 - Policy AG-5: Leases
 - Policy AG-6: Marketing and Promotion
- **Goal AG-2** Sustain and promote environmental health and encourage environmentally sensitive and sustainable agriculture
 - Policy AG-7: Water Quality
 - Policy AG-8: Natural Resources Protection
 - Policy AG-9: Sustainable Practices
 - Policy AG-10: Research

- **Goal AG-3** Support and implement practices enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion on District agricultural lands and within the larger agricultural community
 - Policy AG-11: Farmworker Engagement
 - Policy AG-12: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - Policy AG-13: Partnerships

The complete document of the proposed Ag Policy is provided under Attachment 2. Redline edits to the Ag Policy as compared to the draft from December 8, 2022 is provided under Attachment 3.

FISCAL IMPACT

Adoption of the Ag Policy has no immediate fiscal impact. The Ag Policy will inform future actions that may result in a fiscal impact. A fiscal impact analysis for such future actions would be conducted and presented to the Board when these items are brought forth for consideration of approval.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

In May 2017, a Board Meeting was held in the Coastside region to present an overview of the Coastal Service Plan and the progress made in meeting the commitments since its adoption in 2004. Agricultural conservation is a principal element to the District's mission on the coastside, highlighting the need for an updated Ag Policy. The District began working on the Ag Policy in 2019 with a Board study session focused on summarizing existing District policies and guidelines; summarizing existing agricultural uses on District lands; and identifying gaps in policies and guidelines ([R-19-36, minutes](#)).

Closely following this study session, the Grazing Management Policy Amendment also began with a Planning and Natural Resources Committee meeting on April 9, 2019 ([R-19-40, minutes](#)).

Another Planning and Natural Resources Committee meeting was held on October 22, 2019 ([R-19-139, minutes](#)). This was followed by a final Planning and Natural Resources Committee meeting on December 15, 2020 ([R-20-149, minutes](#)).

The Science Advisory Panel presented the Grazing Report to the full Board on November 4, 2020 ([R-20-129, minutes](#)). The PNR Committee reviewed and forwarded a recommendation for approval of the Grazing Management Policy Amendment on December 15, 2020 ([R-20-149, minutes](#)).

The Board approved the Conservation Grazing Management Policy Amendment ([R-21-22, minutes](#)) on February 10, 2021. The amendments focused on management actions for mitigating and reducing livestock and predator conflicts that are protective of native wildlife, including mountain lions and coyotes.

A workshop was held on September 22, 2021, to proceed with the broader Ag Policy development process and receive input on the timeline, key remaining steps, and potential topics ([R-21-127, minutes](#)).

On December 15, 2021, the Board received an update on the development of the Ag Policy ([R-21-169, minutes](#)). The Board provided additional direction to staff on the District's potential agricultural role for the San Mateo County Coast.

On September 28, 2022, the Board received an update on the partner and stakeholder outreach conducted to support development of a draft of the Ag Policy ([R-22-105, minutes](#)). The Board provided input on the framework for the Ag Policy and next steps in drafting the Ag Policy and consulting with partners and stakeholders.

The Board reviewed the draft Ag Policy during a Special Meeting held on December 8, 2022 ([R-22-139, minutes](#)). Following this meeting, staff consulted with partners and stakeholders on the draft Ag Policy document. The Board also formed an Ad Hoc Committee to review input received during the consultation process and incorporation of recommended changes to the draft Ag Policy.

The Ad Hoc Committee met three times to review feedback received from partners and stakeholders on the Ag Policy and recommended changes to the policy based on feedback received. These meetings occurred on February 21, May 18, and September 12, 2023.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. In addition, previous attendees to District meetings regarding the Ag Policy development were notified.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The Ag Policy is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The proposed Ag Policy includes policies that are intended to provide general guidance to District staff and decision makers related to agriculture activities on District properties. The policies do not identify any new or future projects such that adoption of the Policy would result or lead to either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change. The Ag Policy will inform future actions that may be subject to CEQA, and subsequent environmental evaluation will be conducted at that time. The Ag Policy includes and/or references policies, guidelines and implementation measures in the Board-approved Service Plan for the San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area. The Board certified the San Mateo Coastal Annexation Final Program Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR) on June 5, 2003 (SCH #2000062048). The Ag Policy also includes and/or references policies, guidelines and implementation measures in the Board-approved Resource Management Policies. The Board certified the Resource Management Policies Mitigated Negative Declaration on January 11, 2012 (SCH #2011102020).

NEXT STEPS

If approved, the Ag Policy will be used to guide District agricultural conservation efforts both on District owned and managed lands and working with partners. Staff will begin enacting the Implementation Measures identified in the Ag Policy as work items arise within the different Policy areas. Significantly, these will include:

- Competitive Requests for Proposals will be issued using the policy criteria and recommended operators will be brought to the Board for approval of long-term agricultural leases.
- Annual evaluations of current agricultural tenants will be conducted to provide regular feedback to improve operations and meet resource management goals.
- Staff will conduct outreach on the new components of the Ag Policy with a focus on establishing a dialogue with partners for preserving lands with more intensive agricultural uses, providing farm labor housing, and expanding support for environmentally sensitive and sustainable agriculture projects off District lands that also support District goals.

Attachment(s)

1. Summary of Existing District Agricultural Policies
2. Proposed Agricultural Policy
3. Redline edits to the Agricultural Policy compared to the draft presented to the Board on December 8, 2022.
4. Summary of Stakeholder and Partner Feedback

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Summary of Agricultural Policies

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) agricultural policies are covered in several different documents and policies. The value of agricultural lands are addressed in both the Basic Policy and the District's coastal mission statement. More specific policies are included in the Coastal Service Plan (and associated EIR), Resource Management Policies, Housing Policy, Improvements on District Lands, Integrated Pest Management Program Guidance Manual, and Agricultural Use Policy Statements. Relevant policy statements and implementation measures from each of the following documents are excerpted below.

- Basic Policy
- Agricultural Use Policy Statements
- Service Plan for the Coastal Annexation Area and accompanying Environmental Impact Report
- Memorandum of Understanding between the San Mateo County Farm Bureau and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
- Resource Management Policies
- Integrated Pest Management Program Guidance Manual
- Open Space Vision Plan
- Board Policies: 4.01 Open Space Use and Management Planning Process, 4.02 Improvements on District Lands, 4.11 Housing Policy

Basic Policy (2008)

The Basic Policy provides general guidance on agricultural use, highlighting the District's role in supporting continued agricultural use on open space land and reliance of sound agricultural land management practices that are consistent with the District's Resource Management Policies:

The District supports the continued agricultural use of land acquired for open space as an economic and cultural resource, including, but not limited to, grazing, orchards, row crops, and vineyards. The District does not consider commercial logging as agriculture. The District requires sound agricultural management practices on land it manages or monitors, in accordance with its Resource Management Policies.¹⁷

- **OPEN SPACE:** • Is land area that is allowed to remain in or return to its natural state. Open space lands may include compatible agricultural uses
- **Agriculture and Revenue-Producing Use**
Section f. The District supports the continued agricultural use of land acquired for open space as an economic and cultural resource, including, but not limited to, grazing, orchards, row crops, and vineyards. The District does not consider commercial logging as agriculture. The District requires sound agricultural management practices on land it manages or monitors, in accordance with its Resource Management Policies.

Agricultural Use Policy Statement (1978)

These Board policy statements reference the District's role to "...sustain and encourage agricultural viability consistent with public use while minimizing the impact on the natural environment" and addresses the District's authority to enter into and use agricultural leases.

Coastal Service Plan (2004)

In recognition of the importance of agriculture to the economy and heritage of the San Mateo coastside area, the District's Service Plan provides guidance on the preservation and management of agricultural uses and protection of natural resources on District lands. Consistent with the purpose of San Mateo County's policies and regulations related to agriculture, the Service Plan defines program guidelines to conserve resources on District-owned lands that could be used for agriculture, and to encourage the sale or leasing of District properties for outdoor agriculture. The Service Plan also establishes guidelines for managing the impacts of District programs that could potentially affect adjacent agricultural operations. In addition, the Service Plan provides for the acquisition of conservation easements from willing sellers over private agricultural properties, to promote the economic vitality of continued agricultural operations. In accordance with the Service Plan, the District can actively pursue agricultural easements and leases. The Service Plan emphasizes working in partnership with other land conservation interests, both public and private, in acquiring land and conservation and agricultural easements.

Coastal Mission Statement

- *District To acquire and preserve in perpetuity open space land and agricultural land of regional significance, protect and restore the natural environment, preserve rural character, encourage viable agricultural use of land resources, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.*

Role & Objectives

- "...protect both the agricultural and natural resources of the Coastal Annexation Area. Although the District is not an agricultural preservation district, and does not propose any agricultural subsidy programs, its Service Plan does recognize the importance of agriculture to the economy and heritage of the Coastal Annexation Area."
- "As the District extends its services to the Coast, agricultural preservation will play a larger role in the District's activities than it has within existing District boundaries."

Agriculture

Agriculture is a very important rural land use and open space resource within the Coastal Annexation Area. Consistent with the purpose of San Mateo County's policies and regulations related to agriculture, the Guidelines and Implementation Actions below are directed at:

1. preserving and fostering existing and potential agricultural operations in San Mateo County in order to keep the maximum amount of prime agricultural land and all other lands suitable for agriculture in agricultural production, and
2. minimizing conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses that may occur on District owned or managed lands.

Permanent Policy PA.1: When acquiring lands in agricultural use, the acquisition shall be subject to continued use by the owner or operator until such time as it is sold or leased pursuant to the use and management plan adopted for the property. All agricultural land which is not needed for recreation or for the protection and vital functioning of a sensitive habitat will be permanently protected for agriculture and, whenever legally feasible, the District will offer for sale or lease the maximum amount of agricultural land to active farm operators on terms compatible with the recreational and habitat use. Lands that do not have significant recreation or sensitive habitat values and which can clearly support productive agricultural operations will generally be offered for sale while other agricultural lands will generally be offered for lease. (Reference: Mitigation Measure AGR-3g)

Permanent Policy PA.2: The District shall actively work with lessees of District lands and with the owners of land in which the District has an agricultural easement interest to:

- a. Facilitate the provision of farm worker housing on District- owned lands by providing technical assistance in obtaining permits for such housing from the County of San Mateo.
- b. Seek grant funding for the continuation or establishment of viable agriculture through the California Farmland Conservancy Program and other agriculture grant programs.
- c. Provide technical assistance to secure water rights for the continuation or establishment of viable agriculture consistent with protection of sensitive habitats.

(Reference: Mitigation Measure AGR-3j)

Permanent Policy PA.3: The District shall actively pursue opportunities to enter agricultural easements and leases with interested farmers and ranchers. All agricultural easements and agricultural leases in the Coastal Annexation Area shall:

- a. Be tailored to meet individual farmers and ranchers needs while respecting the unique characteristics of the property;
- b. Specify uses that are unconditionally permitted pursuant to the easement or lease to provide certainty to the farmer or rancher entering the lease or easement with the District;
- c. Include terms that allow farmers and ranchers to adapt and expand their operations and farming practices to adjust to changing economic conditions;
- d. Include terms that ensure farmers or ranchers may provide farm labor housing as defined and approved by San Mateo County;
- e. Ensure compatibility of resource protection and management, low-intensity public recreation and viable agricultural operations; and
- f. In the case of leases, be for a sufficient period of time to gain a return on the investment in the agricultural operation.

(Reference: Mitigation Measure AGR-3k)

Guideline G.3.1: The District shall conduct its land management practices such that they do not have an adverse significant impact on the physical and economic integrity of prime agricultural lands on or contiguous to properties owned or managed by the District (e.g. establishing appropriate buffers on District lands, etc.).

Guideline G.3.2: Improvements or public uses located upon open space lands other than agriculture shall be located away from existing prime agricultural lands and Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency. All trails and other public facilities should be located so as not to fragment agricultural operations unless no feasible alternative is available. While trails that bisect grazing lands would not be likely to fragment grazing operations, trails that bisect cultivated crops could adversely affect the vitality of agricultural operations and should be avoided. If trails must traverse cultivated lands then they shall be permitted only if adequate buffers, signs, and other measures necessary to ensure that trail use does not interfere with the agricultural operations are implemented." (Reference: Mitigation AGR-3a)

Guideline G.3.3: All lands acquired by the District within the Coastal Annexation Area will be inventoried to identify and prioritize resource management issues. Where there are critical issues, such as the presence of non-native invasive species which threaten the habitat of endangered species or the economic viability of an adjacent agricultural operation, resource management plans will be prepared for these areas even if they remain closed to the public.

The use and management plan shall include an agricultural production plan for District-owned agricultural lands or District lands adjacent to agricultural lands. For district-owned lands, the plan shall describe the crop and/or livestock potential for the property together with the management actions required to protect existing agricultural production (e.g., growing seasons, water requirements, pesticide, manure, and waste management) and the agricultural potential of the land. The plan shall consider the following factors:

- a. Availability of labor, including farm labor housing;
- b. Availability of farm support services and goods;
- c. Necessary capital improvements (e.g. water storage, fencing, land leveling)
- d. Farm operations, including erosion control, the season(s) and times of pesticide or herbicide usage, manure and waste management;
- e. Water use and availability;
- f. Access to transportation and markets; and
- g. Promoting agricultural production on District-owned land.

In the case of District lands adjacent to agricultural production, the agricultural production plan shall develop site-specific measures to prevent activities on District lands from interfering with adjacent agricultural production.

The development of use and management plans will include consultation with the current owner or operator of any agricultural operations on the land, adjoining landowners, the San Mateo County Environmental Services Agency in addition to other opportunities for public involvement (Reference Mitigation AGR-3h and BI0-3)

Guideline G.3.4: In areas where trails would pass potentially hazardous adjacent land uses (e.g., timber operations), trail structures such as fences, barriers, and signs shall be used to deter trail users from leaving the trail and encountering unsafe conditions. Temporary trail closures shall be employed during intermittent operations, such as agricultural spraying, that would jeopardize the safety of an otherwise safe trail. (Reference: Mitigation LU-1a)

Guideline G.3.5: No new buildings or staging areas shall be located on prime agricultural lands or on Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency. Ranger office/maintenance facilities and staging areas may not be located on prime agricultural lands or on Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-1a)

Guideline G.3.6: Trails and habitat preservation areas shall either be located to avoid prime agricultural lands and Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency or traverse such lands in a manner that does not result in interference with agricultural activities or substantially reduce the agricultural potential of those lands. Owners and operators of agricultural lands shall be consulted to identify appropriate routes on those lands. The agricultural activities and the agricultural potential of traversed lands shall be protected and buffered from trail user impacts by means of distance, physical barriers (i.e., sturdy fences), or other non-disruptive methods. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-1b)

Guideline G.3.7: The District shall provide private property signs where appropriate and provide trail users information regarding private property rights to minimize public/private use conflicts and trespassing. The District shall clearly sign trails adjacent to active agriculture and provide trail users with information regarding property rights to minimize trespassing and conflicts with agricultural users. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-3b)

Guideline G.3.8: Trails shall either be located to avoid prime agricultural lands and Unique Farmlands or Farmlands of Statewide Importance as shown on Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency or traverse such lands in a manner that does not result in interference with agricultural activities or substantially reduce the agricultural potential of those lands. Operators of active agricultural activities on lands owned by or under easement to the District shall be consulted to identify appropriate routes on lands they cultivate. Owners and operators of agricultural lands adjacent to District lands used for non-agricultural purposes shall be consulted to identify routes that will avoid adverse effects on agricultural operations. The agricultural activities and the agricultural potential of traversed lands shall be

protected and buffered from trail user impacts by means of distance, physical barriers (i.e., sturdy fences), or other non-disruptive methods. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-3c)

Guideline G.3.9: The District lands or easements upon which trails are sited shall provide width sufficient for management and/or buffer space from adjacent uses so as not to preclude the viability of those uses. Buffers established to separate recreation and other open space uses from agricultural operations shall be designed and managed in accordance with the following standards:

- a. Buffers shall be designed in relation to the nature of the adjoining land use, potential land uses, and proposed public access;
- b. Buffers shall be designed in relation to the topography and other physical characteristics of the buffer area;
- c. Buffers shall be designed with consideration of biological, soil, and other site conditions in order to limit the potential spread of non-native invasive species or pathogens onto agricultural lands;
- d. Buffers shall be of sufficient width to allow agricultural use of adjoining agricultural lands including application of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals taking into account the likelihood and extent of potential pesticide drift;
- e. All lands used for buffers should be on land or interests in land owned by the District; adjoining landowners shall not be required to provide land for buffers.
- f. The District shall be responsible for the management and maintenance of all lands used as buffers.
- g. If a specific buffer fails to resolve conflicts between a recreational use and adjacent agricultural uses the recreational use shall be moved to a different location.
- h. All buffers shall be developed in consultation with the owners and operators of adjoining agricultural lands

(Reference: Mitigation AGR-3d)

Guideline G.3.10: Where pesticides are used, including pesticides for control of noxious weeds, they must be handled, applied, and disposed of in such a manner that they do not adversely affect adjacent agriculture including organic agriculture. Pesticide use shall be guided by label restrictions and any advisories published by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CDPR) or the County Agricultural Commission. These chemicals shall only be applied by a person who is properly trained in their application. (Reference: Mitigation AGR-3e)

Implementation Action G.3.A(i): In acquiring lands and preparing site assessments, the District shall recognize that agriculture in the marketplace is dynamic and that agricultural use practices must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, relative to current marketplace conditions. On a case-by-case basis, the District shall determine how best to continue agricultural uses consistent with protection of rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species and their habitat. See also Guideline G.6.3

Implementation Action G.3.B(i) The development of agricultural policies, preparation of site assessments and preparation of access plans for low-intensity public recreation by the District affecting prime agricultural lands shall include consultation with local agricultural interests such as the San Mateo County Agricultural Advisory Committee, the Resource Conservation District, and the local Farm Bureau, and will be subject to public review.

See also Guidelines G.6.3

Implementation Action G.3.C(i) Where the District acquires conservation easements on agricultural lands, the District will consider as a term of the easement on a case- by-case basis allowing all agricultural uses permitted by San Mateo County.

Forestry

The intent of the following guidelines is to recognize that the District is not in the commercial forestry business but that in limited circumstances the removal of trees is in the best interest of managing the ecological health and public safety conditions of the site.

Guideline G.4.1: The District shall not propose commercial harvest of timber on District-owned property except in the limited cases described in Guideline G.4.3 below.

Guideline G.4.2: On a case-by-case basis, the District may purchase property or an easement that includes approved timber harvest plans.

Guideline G.4.3: On rare occasions, the District may permit limited tree removal on District-owned property where a timber harvest plan does not previously exist, if such actions are shown to be in the best interest of managing the ecological values, protecting public safety, or controlling disease within the property or watershed. In such cases, the timber may be sold.

Guideline G.4.4: The District shall conduct its land management practices such that they do not have an adverse significant impact on the physical and economic integrity of timberland preserves on or contiguous to properties owned or managed by the District and so that the safety of visitors to District preserves is not compromised by timber harvesting (e.g., establishing appropriate buffers on District lands). (Reference Mitigation AGR-3f)

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the San Mateo County Farm Bureau and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (2004)

The MOU with the San Mateo Farm Bureau memorializes parts of the Coastal Service Plan and associated environmental review and requires consultation with the Farm Bureau on site specific use and management plans and agricultural production plans in the coastal protection area.

Resource Management Policies (2022) - Conservation Grazing Management Policy Key Points

The Resource Management Policies define the policies and practices that set the framework and general guidance for protecting and managing resources on District lands. Agricultural resources are primarily addressed in goals, policies and implementation measures under Conservation Grazing Management and Climate Change. In the definition of the purpose of open space, the Resource Management Policies state, “[o]pen space may include compatible agriculture uses.”

- **Policy GM-1** Ensure that conservation grazing is compatible with and supports wildlife and wildlife habitats.
 - Inventory and assess sensitive habitats to identify areas requiring special management practices. The conservation of these areas will take precedence over other uses and management practices that are determined to have an adverse effect on these resources.
 - Prepare site-specific grazing management plans by a certified rangeland manager including best management practices (BMPs) for preserves where grazing will be utilized as a resource management tool. The site-specific grazing management plan will be a component of the agricultural production plan developed through the Use and Management Planning process. The Use and Management Planning process provides for public input and Board approval of site-specific grazing management plans.
 - Manage agricultural leases and easements to protect and enhance riparian areas and to maximize the protection or enhancement of water quality. (See WR-4)
 - Per the District’s long-standing policy of protecting native predators, continue to prohibit the lethal take of predators in response to livestock depredation.
- **Policy GM-2** Provide necessary infrastructure to support and improve grazing management where appropriate.
 - Utilize fencing that allows wildlife movement and fosters habitat connectivity (See WM-3:Measure 3).
 - Manage access to existing water features and where needed supply supplemental drinking water through stock ponds and water troughs to preserve clean water for livestock, protect water quality, and enhance habitat for wildlife.
 - Encourage and assist grazing tenants on District land to provide range improvements to restore or conserve wildland resources and to enhance range condition.
 - Inventory and assess roads and trails on District lands to identify significant erosion and sediment sources – abandon and where feasible restore to a natural condition poorly designed or sited roads (See WR-4).
- **Policy GM-3** Monitor environmental response to grazing on District lands.

- Monitor forage utilization and distribution by grazing animals to assure appropriate amounts of residual dry matter (RDM) remain on the ground to achieve desired resource management objectives. In the course of RDM monitoring, evaluate and report on wildland fire fuel levels that may result in an increased risk of wildland fire (See WF policies).
 - Monitor livestock use levels and agricultural infrastructure condition to insure conformity with lease provisions to contribute to improved management.
 - Monitor wildland conditions with an emphasis on documenting the location, distribution and abundance of native grasses, wildflowers, and other native flora and fauna.
 - Monitor water quality in ponds, wetlands, and watercourses with unrestricted livestock access.
 - Monitor non-native vegetation response to grazing with an emphasis on documenting the location, distribution and abundance of target, invasive species.
 - Use information collected from monitoring to annually review rangeland conditions and response to livestock grazing. Use adaptive resource management decision making framework within grazing management plans.
- **Policy GM-4** Utilize different livestock species to accomplish vegetation management objectives.
 - Research the effective use of cattle, goats, sheep, and horses to manage vegetation on District lands.
 - Utilize appropriate species depending on management needs.
 - **Policy GM-5** Preserve and foster existing and potential conservation grazing operations to help sustain the local agricultural economy.
 - Establish longer term grazing leases to promote financial viability for the operators and efficient land stewardship for the District.
 - Seek grants or other economic support for agricultural infrastructure maintenance and improvements.
 - Ensure site-specific grazing management plans are economically feasible and practical for conservation grazing operators.
 - **Policy GM-6** Provide information to the public about the region's rural agricultural heritage. (See PI-1)
 - Install display boards and give presentations highlighting historical and educational facts about ranching families and industry at appropriate sites.
 - **Policy GM-7** Provide public access in a manner that minimizes impacts on the conservation grazing operation. (See PI-1)
 - Conservation Grazing operators on District lands or lands under easement to the District shall be consulted when public access is being planned and considered for the property to minimize conflicts between the public and the conservation grazing operation.

- Prepare and distribute a brochure to educate visitors about etiquette for use of open space property with livestock animals.
- Install signage where appropriate to educate the public about the resource benefits of conservation grazing and to educate visitors about approaching animals, closing gates, and other etiquette appropriate for moving through lands with livestock animals.
- **Policy GM-8** Conservation Grazing operations on District lands in San Mateo County will be managed in accordance with the policies established in the Service Plan for the San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area.
 - Consult with appropriate agencies and interest groups, including the San Mateo County Farm Bureau and San Mateo County Agricultural Advisory Committee in the development of site-specific Use and Management plans and agricultural production plan components in the Coastside Protection Area.
- **Policy GM-9** Safeguard native plants and wildlife while promoting the economic sustainability of conservation cattle grazing as a resource management tool and reducing predation of livestock.
 - Consider the economic impact of predation in setting lease rates for conservation grazing tenants.
 - Provide economic relief for conservation grazing tenants who, as required per conditions of a Board of Directors approved lease, are performing resource management services and are in good standing with the District, in response to confirmed cattle losses from predation to sustain conservation grazing as a viable tool for natural resource management. Require cattle grazing tenants to document annual livestock losses due to both predation and non-predation-related causes.
 - Support and promote scientific research on the effectiveness of wildlife and livestock protection methods, and their influence on wildlife behavior, grazing productivity, and livestock health. Periodically review research results and consider findings in future policy development.

Resource Management Policies (2022) – Integrated Pest Management Policy Key Points

Policy IPM-1 Develop specific pest management strategies and priorities that address each of the five work categories.

- Manage pests in rangelands and on agricultural properties to support existing uses, while also protecting human health and surrounding natural resources.

Policy IPM-2 Take appropriate actions to prevent the introduction of new pest species to District preserves, especially new invasive plants in natural areas, rangelands, and agricultural properties.

Integrated Pest Management Program Guidance Manual (2014)

9 IPM FOR RANGELANDS AND AGRICULTURAL PROPERTIES

9.1 DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

Some District lands encompass rangelands, crop fields, and orchards that are actively managed as grazing or agricultural operations. Rangeland and agriculture activities on District preserves are primarily managed by lessees who typically operate under a Rangeland Management Plan or Agricultural Management Plan that is attached to their lease. These site-specific management plans guide the rangeland and agricultural activities to ensure compatibility with natural resource protection and low-intensity public recreation. This IPMP does not replace the requirements of the individual range or agricultural management plans, nor does it present the full range of agricultural or range management options. Rather, it seeks to provide staff with tools that are consistent with IPM principles to select the safest, least harmful, and most effective treatment options for rangeland and agricultural pests.

Open Space Vision Plan (2014)

The Vision Plan discusses overarching themes, subthemes and goals that guide the District's work. The Viable Working Lands theme includes goals related to agricultural resources for protecting viable working lands that reflect our heritage and provide food and jobs. Subthemes of the Vision Plan: support agriculture and local food producers; model ecologically sound practices and educate.

Board Policy 4.01 Open Space Use and Management Planning Process (2009)

Board Policy 4.01 *Open Space Use and Management Planning Process* describes a systematic approach to the development of management plans and outlines the importance of use and management plans, which include the discussion of current agricultural uses and agricultural preservation needs of a District property, such as grazing and continuation of agricultural activities. The policy also discusses how the presence of active agricultural uses would be a factor in designating areas of preserves as Conservation Management Units which would restrict general public access.

Board Policy 4.11 Housing Policy (2017)

- 2. Agricultural.

- a. Agricultural Lease Holder. District housing offered for agricultural lease holder will either be negotiated in conjunction with an agricultural lease or be market rate.
 - b. Agricultural Labor. District housing offered for agricultural labor is generally governed by a District lease or license. Agricultural housing rents and associated discounts are negotiated on a case-by-case basis and brought to the Board consistent with the policy regarding *Improvements on District Lands* (Policy 4.02). If District housing is made available to agricultural labor outside of a District Lease or License, the agricultural labor tenant is required to work for a District agricultural tenant on District Lands. Rent will either be negotiated in the agricultural lease, market rate, or an affordable housing rate.
- 2. Agricultural. The selection of agricultural residential sites shall be based on their proximity to the District agricultural leases on District Lands. Due to the need for an on-site presence for some agricultural lands, this use may take priority over employees that provide direct services in some cases.

Board Policy 4.02 Improvements on District Lands (2017)

Board Policy 4.02 *Improvements on District Lands* guides the preparation of recommended actions concerning structures and improvements to inform the Board’s decision. The policy states that existing structures and other improvements on District lands are potential resources and as such will be evaluated for potential retention and will be addressed in site planning documents. These structures and resources include agricultural worker housing, agricultural and grazing infrastructure such as water storage facilities, outbuildings, corrals, fencing and etc. The policy states, “[a]s the District acquires agricultural properties, housing is needed for agricultural lease holders and their agricultural workers. Residences on District agricultural properties should be evaluated as potential housing for agricultural labor.”

- C (1) As the District acquires agricultural properties, housing is needed for agricultural lease holders and their agricultural workers. Residences on District agricultural properties should be evaluated as potential housing for agricultural labor.
- C (3) Improvements which Contribute to the Character of the Site:
(e.g., Buildings with Unique Historical or Architectural merit, Barns, Sheds and Fences)
Some structures associated with agriculture or other former uses of the site can contribute significantly to the site without detracting from its open space character. When economically feasible within the constraints of the land management budget, examples of these structures will be retained, maintained, and when possible put to use.
- C (4) Improvements for Agriculture and Other Special Uses:
Agricultural use which is consistent with the open space use of a site is encouraged by the District. Improvements for agriculture or other special uses will be retained or

constructed as approved by the Board and stated in the site planning documents. In the Coastside Protection Area; leases, use, and improvements shall be consistent with the District's Service Plan Policies

###

AGRICULTURAL POLICY

BACKGROUND

The public benefits of conserving land as **open space** are many: clean air, clean water, **biodiversity**, climate resiliency and the well-being that comes with spending time in nature.

On the San Mateo County Coast, much of the undeveloped open space land has a long history of agricultural use. Active **agriculture** is an essential source of local food and natural products today.

In June 2003, the Board adopted the **San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area (CAA) Service Plan**¹ (Service Plan) to establish the policies, guidelines, and commitments governing District activities and services within coastal San Mateo County, an area known as the Coastside Protection Area. The San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) approved the CAA in September 2004.

Since LAFCo approval, the District has completed numerous projects related to land purchases², **conservation grazing**, protecting unique **natural** and scenic **resources**, stream habitat **restoration**, and new public access opportunities. In addition, the District has fostered partnerships and new relationships on the coast and secured grants and other funding to support the preservation and stewardship of coastal open space properties and working lands. All of this work recognizes the importance of agriculture to the local

In the years 1940 through 1950, San Mateo County was one of California's most productive agricultural regions. As the bayside was developed the remaining agriculture preserved or developed was on the Coastside, which specialized in crops suitable for the mild coastal climate. Many farmers, ranchers and farmworkers have worked in agriculture for multi-generations on the coast. Today, agriculture faces many pressures including international competition, reduction in regional supporting infrastructure and competition for non-agriculture residential use. Preservation of continued agricultural uses requires partnerships between farmers and ranchers, government agencies and non-profits.

¹ [San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area \(CAA\) Service Plan](#)

economy and heritage of the San Mateo County coast. The agricultural policies identified in this document are consistent with the Service Plan, which controls District activities in the Coastal Protection Area. These policies also cover lands outside the coastal protection area unless otherwise noted.

The District’s mission for the Coastside Protection Area is as follows (bold denotes additions to the basic Mission Statement):

*“To acquire and preserve in perpetuity open space land **and agricultural land of regional significance**, protect and restore the natural environment, **preserve rural character, encourage viable agricultural use of land resources**, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.”*

The “viable agricultural use of land resources” is defined as uses that do not deplete natural resources, such as water and soil, that support the agriculture operation, and that the agricultural use is economically viable over the long term.

The District’s agricultural conservation work strives to support both agricultural use and protection of natural resources. Conservation that achieves this dual benefit makes up the majority of District agricultural preservation activity, focused on coastal grasslands that support livestock grazing (ranching) and coastal grassland habitats where much of the farming activities occur.

The District considers viable agricultural use of land resources to be those agricultural activities that do not exceed the capacity of the supporting natural resources (e.g., **water quality** and supply, **soil** nutrients and structure), do not produce waste products that are persistent, hazardous or toxic to the environment, and is economically feasible for the farmer/rancher. By preserving and supporting agricultural uses on the San Mateo County Coast, the District is working to protect **wildlife corridors**, scenic open space views, groundwater infiltration, and other **ecosystem** and open space benefits in addition to supporting environmentally and financially sustainable agriculture.

As of this writing (2023), the District has preserved over 17,000 acres of open space within the Coastside Protection Area. About 60% of that land is leased to small-scale ranchers through the District’s conservation grazing program to sustain coastal grasslands, one of North America’s most biodiverse and threatened ecosystems. Several endangered, threatened and special-status species, like the San Francisco garter snake, American badger, burrowing owl and California red-legged frog, depend on open grassland habitat and the various stock ponds found within rangeland properties. As the District **enhances** grassland and pond habitats to benefit

wildlife and encourage agricultural use of land resources, the ecological function of coastal lands is also preserved. Numerous District-owned agricultural lands outside the Coastal Protection Area are similarly leased to various agricultural operators.

Although the majority of the District's agricultural acreage is in grazing (ranching), the District leases out 130 acres of row crops, vineyards, Christmas tree farms, and orchards to farmers. On the coastside, in accordance with the Coastal Service Plan, the District offers a lease option to tenants/farmers who are conducting agricultural uses on newly acquired coastal lands until the property is sold or a request for proposals for a long-term lease is solicited and a new lease awarded.

Each of the District's agricultural properties requires key infrastructure (water systems, fencing, roads, corrals, and barns) to support an onsite agricultural operation and accomplish the District's land management goals. In particular, conservation grazing often requires fencing to protect creeks, as well as reliable water sources (**livestock** watering) that support the distribution of cattle across the landscape to achieve **resource management** goals.

In general, newly acquired properties have lacked the infrastructure to run a successful conservation grazing program. The District prepares customized Rangeland Management Plans (RMPs) for each new grazing property that sets grazing parameters based on site conditions like water availability. RMPs include a list of new infrastructure improvements to effectively support the conservation grazing operation.

In addition, the District enters into conservation grazing leases that specify the roles for both the tenant and the District regarding the construction and maintenance of the onsite infrastructure during the lease term. While the District funds most infrastructure improvements, the District depends on tenants to install portions of the infrastructure (e.g., water troughs, fencing sections) and make maintenance and operational repairs. Additionally, tenants work with the District to eliminate **invasive species** as directed by the District's Integrated Pest Management program.

San Mateo County has a diverse assemblage of agricultural production crops that includes indoor (greenhouse 72 acres) and outdoor (420 acres) grown floral and nursery products (the largest economic sector 60%), vegetables, fruits and nuts (1,272 acres, livestock and apiary products and field crops (27,338 acres including 26,258 acres of pasture). [2022 San Mateo County Agricultural Report] Listed in the report but not covered in this policy are forest products, fish catch and cannabis.

Rural character is difficult to define but the coastal service plan describes what needs protection. "The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Board of Directors agrees the agricultural and open space resources along approximately 40 miles of the San Mateo County coast are of national significance and deserve the highest level of stewardship possible. Through these Agricultural Policies, the District endeavors to expand its central mission of natural protection to include agricultural practices that protect the land, its rural agriculture landscapes and way of life.

These Agricultural Policies are a “living” document that will grow and change regularly, based on new experience and information. Policy language will be reviewed and updated as needed.

AGRICULTURAL GOALS, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Approved by the District Board of Directors in 2003 and by the San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission in 2004, the Coastal Service Plan established the District’s mission of agricultural conservation in the San Mateo County Coastside region as well as the entire suite of open space protection and management services the District provides in the coastal protection area.

Goal AG-1 Continue existing and introduce new agricultural operations within the Coastside Protection Area in order to keep prime agricultural land in agricultural production while ensuring the protection of sensitive natural resources. Maintain agricultural uses outside the Coastal Protection Area when they support open space, natural resource, and/or public access goals. Minimize conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses on District owned or managed lands.

Policy AG-1 In the Coastside Protection Area, the fee purchase and protection of agricultural lands will focus on properties that also provide benefits for sensitive **habitat** and natural resource values and/or compatible low intensity recreational opportunities. In the coastside protection area, the preservation of significant agricultural lands without significant natural resource or public access benefits access benefits, such as row crops, should be supported through partnerships and led by partners.

- a) Lands that do not have open space, sensitive habitat, or public access values and which clearly support productive agricultural operations will generally be offered for sale, subject to affirmative agricultural and/or **conservation easements**, while other

agricultural lands, typically rangelands, will generally be offered for lease. (Service Plan³ PA.1)

- b) Offer for sale or lease the maximum amount of productive agricultural land to farmers/ranchers who will actively operate agricultural uses on the land subject to the protection of habitat values and current or planned recreational uses. (Service Plan PA.1)
- c) Focus on purchasing in fee and managing rangelands in perpetuity.
- d) In the coastside protection area, work in partnership with organizations like Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) to prevent the conversion or loss of agricultural lands and their natural resource values through funding contributions with the ultimate goal of transferring these lands to private farmers subject to land protections such as agricultural conservation easements.
- e) To the extent practical and if aligned with District policies, keep agricultural uses within the same or contiguous properties together when the agricultural uses are run by the same operator.
- f) When applicable and appropriate, structure agricultural conservation easements to protect the environmental quality, **historic** significance, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and/or open space values of agricultural lands.

Policy AG-2 Where compatible with the natural, cultural and agricultural resources located on agricultural lands, provide low-intensity public access and **environmental education**.

- a) Evaluate the compatibility of low-intensity public access on District-owned agricultural lands to facilitate access and trail connections. (Service Plan PA.3)

*Ensuring compatibility of low-intensity recreation with agricultural activities is a strong focus for the District's management of agricultural open space lands. District public access facilities are typically limited to parking and hiking, bicycling, equestrian trails and limited dog access. Design guidelines consider and minimize the **potential impacts** of trail use to agricultural operations.*

³ [San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area \(CAA\) Service Plan](#)

Conservation grazing differs from conventional grazing by considering and minimizing the negative impacts to natural resources and utilizing grazing activity to enhance natural resources. The specific policies defining how the District manages open space through conservation grazing principles are described in the District's Resource Management Policies, Conservation Grazing Management chapter (Chapter XI).

- b) Work closely with agricultural tenants to identify appropriate levels of public access through or adjacent to agricultural lands, and the infrastructure, signage, setbacks, buffers, and other measures that improve compatibility and minimize/avoid potential recreational impacts to agricultural uses and vice versa.
- c) Solicit input from landowners, farmers, ranchers and other operators of adjacent agricultural lands to inform the development of use and management plans for District lands. (Service Plan Guidelines G.3.8 and G.6.3)
- d) Locate trails, trailhead access points, parking and other visitor-serving facilities on District lands in harmony with the surrounding agricultural uses, where the siting of facilities and buffers in the coastal protection area are consistent with the Coastal Service Plan and EIR mitigation measures, while complying with current regulatory requirements. (Service Plan Guideline G.3.9)
- e) Solicit input from other local public agencies, conservation organizations, non-profit entities, and community groups to inform the placement of public trails and other low-intensity public access facilities that traverse or are located adjacent to agricultural lands. (Service Plan Guideline G.8)
- f) Implement temporary closures of specific trails that are located on agricultural lands to facilitate intermittent agricultural activities and protect visitor safety, as may be necessary (e.g., calving season, transportation of livestock, crop harvest, chemical applications, etc.). (Service Plan Guideline G.3.4)

Policy AG-3 Retain current District agricultural housing and expand agricultural housing opportunities when feasible to further District goals.

- a) Consider opportunities to partner with and support local organizations that provide affordable regional agricultural workforce housing when such partnerships help further District goals.
- b) Consider partnerships to develop and manage agricultural workforce housing on District lands in appropriate locations that

do not conflict with natural resource protection and/or ecologically sensitive public access goals. In general, open space lands do not provide sustainable housing development locations and new housing would be limited to specific circumstances in disturbed areas with existing infrastructure.

- c) Prioritize the leasing of District residences that are needed to support an agricultural operation located on District lands to the grazing operator/lessee or farm/ranch worker who is actively farming or grazing on the land unless otherwise essential for operational needs as District employee housing. (Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy⁴)
- d) Farm Worker Housing- Provide discounted rates for District housing that is occupied by a non-lease holding farm/ranch employee/s who supports an agricultural operation on District land.
- e) Agricultural Operator (Lease Holder) Housing- Rent District housing at prevailing rental market rates for lease holders. (Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy)

***Agricultural infrastructure** is critical to sustainable and environmentally responsible agricultural production and land management. Water infrastructure and supply is a critical limiting factor, fencing is essential, and structures such as corrals and barns are necessary. Historically, the high cost of constructing and maintaining these facilities, led to an under investment in infrastructure. Upgrading infrastructure for current use often benefits both the agricultural business and the natural resources through efficiency improvements and reduced footprint.*

Policy AG-4 Provide necessary infrastructure and incentives to support and improve agricultural operations, where appropriate.

Identify future investments in fencing infrastructure on District agricultural lands to establish property boundaries and protect natural resources and neighboring lands. (Resource Management Policies⁵ CGM-2, CGM-5)

- a) Develop water infrastructure to support agricultural operations that also maintains and protects natural resources. (Resource Management Policies CGM-2)

⁴ [Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy](#)

⁵ [Resource Management Policies](#)

Tenant-in-good-standing is an assessment of how well a tenant complies with lease terms and specified land management objectives laid out in rangeland management plans or agriculture production plans.

- b) Improve water supply, efficiency, and resiliency to drought for District-owned residences on agricultural lands. (Resource Management Policies WR-5)
- c) Work with tenants to maintain or improve agricultural structures such as barns and corrals.
- d) Allow tenant-funded infrastructure improvements that support **intensive agriculture** if they do not have significant impacts on natural resources, rural character or public access.
- e) Prioritize investment in water infrastructure with direct natural resource benefit, such as distributing water to improve grazing management and livestock rotation in grassland habitats, investing in water storage to reduce in-stream water use, and improving or creating stock ponds that also provide critical habitat.

Policy AG-5 Structure agricultural leases to accomplish land management objectives and establish leases that promote conservation goals balanced with economically viable agricultural uses.

- a) In the coastside protection area, in accordance with the Coastal Service Plan, after the purchase of active agricultural lands, the land shall be subject to continued use by the existing agricultural operator until such time as the District either sells the property or issues a request for proposals and awards a new long-term agricultural lease. (Service Plan PA.1)
- b) After the acquisition of a property and the development of an agriculture production plan or rangeland management plan, solicit a request for proposals to enter into a new long-term lease for agricultural lands.
- c) At the end of a lease, resolicit a request for proposals to enter into a new long-term lease.

- d) Long term leases shall be structured with periodic options to allow renewal or ending the lease and provisions for terminating leases for poor performance or violations of lease terms.
- e) Enter into agricultural leases with term durations that support the financial viability of agricultural operations so as to promote tenant investments that are beneficial for the land and the agricultural production; the lease term length should be based on the type of agricultural operation. (Resource Management Policies CGM-5)
- f) Work with local organizations to ensure that agricultural lease opportunities are well publicized, including to new/early-career producers and agricultural workers.
- g) When soliciting for new agricultural tenants, include selection criteria pertaining to local preference, Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (DEI), tenant in-good-standing, and environmental sustainability as well as the ability to manage and operate the agricultural operation.
- h) When awarding leases, the District shall factor in the performance of existing/prior agricultural tenants, including their stewardship practices, implementation of Board-approved resource management plans/actions, accommodation of low intensity public access, and use of sustainability practices in their agricultural operations.
- i) Consider setting aside appropriate leases for the purpose of providing an opportunity for farm workers and communities that have not typically had opportunities to lease and operate agricultural operations.

Agritourism links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors to the San Mateo County Coastside and/or individual agricultural properties in the region. Examples are local sales of agricultural products on site or through farmers markets, u-pick sites, and fairs or festivals celebrating agriculture such as the pumpkin festival.

Policy AG-6 Ensure that marketing and promotion of agricultural products produced on District lands are compatible with resource protection policies. Allow District tenants to market and promote their products on District lands and support regional efforts that promote local food sources as a sustainable approach to feeding Bay Area residents. Provide and support regional

The District manages its water resources for ecological biological, and agricultural uses. Climate change impacts and increased consumptive uses will strain supplies, and careful management will be needed to meet the competing needs of agriculture and wildlife during drought conditions. Agricultural management prescriptions such as stocking rates on grazed lands are variable dependent on seasonal rainfall. In addition, investment in off-stream storage or utilization of wells and springs rather than stream diversions can enhance fish and wildlife habitat viability by reducing impacts on in-stream water flow in the summer.

education opportunities that raise awareness of environmental benefits related to agricultural land protection and management.

- a) Allow marketing of events and appropriate signage by tenants to develop brand identity and promote their products on District lands. Require signage to include identification of the District as the landowner.
- b) Communicate and educate the public on the environmental benefits of agricultural uses on District lands, the District's coastal mission, the history of agriculture on the San Mateo Coast in protecting rural character and the natural resources, the grassland management benefits of conservation grazing, and the protection of natural resources on agricultural lands via **programming**, signing, the website and social media.
- c) Allow appropriate use of pictures of District landscapes by District tenants to promote their products.
- d) Allow District tenants to include mention of their status as an agricultural tenant who operates on District lands as part of their marketing and promotional materials; grazers who are part of the conservation grazing program can also mention their participation in the program and the benefits of grazing in protecting the natural resources.

Goal AG-2 Sustain and promote environmental health and encourage environmentally sensitive and sustainable agriculture.

Policy AG-7 Encourage environmentally sensitive and sustainable agricultural practices on District lands that preserve and protect water quality and **riparian** habitats.

- a) Manage agricultural leases and easements to optimize the protection and **enhancement** of riparian areas, water quality, and quantity of water available for natural resources. (Resource Management Policies WR-2).

- b) Secure water rights for District agricultural lands to support the viability of agricultural uses while remaining protective of sensitive habitats (Service Plan PA.2).
- c) Phase in the installation of water meters or other measures to monitor consumptive water use (Resource Management Policies WR-4) for agricultural activities to balance with supply and to promote healthy ecological function.
- d) Develop, regularly update and implement **Best Management Practices** for efficient use of water by agricultural tenants.
- e) Identify and replace diversions that strain water sources, especially those that significantly impact **special status** species, with other reliable sources (e.g., wells, retention ponds, etc.) (Resource Management Policies WR-8).
- f) Evaluate and alter, as feasible, water-intensive land management practices during drought conditions to reduce overall District-wide water consumption (Resource Management Policies WR-8).

Policy AG-8 Encourage environmentally sensitive practices on District lands that enhance the benefits and/or reduce negative impacts to the natural resources.

- a) Locate agricultural activities, facility development, and trail construction away from sensitive resource areas to the greatest extent possible and otherwise incorporate measures to reduce potential resource impacts (Resource Management Policies GS-2).
- b) Manage **pests** on agricultural properties to protect surrounding natural resources while also protecting human health and supporting existing agricultural uses through an **integrated pest management program**. (Resource Management Policies IPM-1).

Farmers utilize many different agricultural practices when deciding how to produce crops. Regenerative agriculture is one approach that has been adopted by several ranchers and farmers on the coastside, which is a conservation and rehabilitation approach to food and farming systems that has many practices consistent with the District's land management mission. Through these practices, farmers and ranchers focus on the soil ecosystems to increase biodiversity and enhance ecosystem services.

- c) Take appropriate actions to prevent the introduction of new pest species to District preserves, especially new invasive plants in natural areas, rangelands, and agricultural properties (Resource Management Policies IPM-2).
- d) Provide technical support and incentives for tenants to implement environmentally sensitive, natural resource-protective practices on District lands and support regional programs that promote environmentally sensitive, natural resource-protective agricultural practices.
- e) Promote integrated pest management agricultural production methods.
- f) Prohibit uses incompatible with natural resource protection or the District's mission, including agriculture production primarily contained within structures such as greenhouses or feed lots and cultivation of cannabis.

Policy AG-9 Promote climate resiliency and encourage environmentally sustainable agricultural practices on District lands that store carbon and promote soil and grassland health.

- a) Support soil health improvement practices and cultivation of climatically appropriate crops on District lands that are also protective of the surrounding natural resources.
- b) Promote practices that enhance carbon storage where these practices are compatible with other natural resource protection.
- c) Offer and/or sponsor educational opportunities for tenant farmers/ranchers and farmworkers/ranch workers regarding sustainable farm and conservation grazing operational practices that are protective of the natural resources.

Policy AG-10 Support research focused on agricultural practices that increase environmentally sustainable use of land resources, climate adaptation, and/or increase habitat values on agricultural lands.

- a) Invest in research of new techniques that improve resource use efficiencies to further expand the protection of natural resources, reduce **non-target** natural resource impacts of agricultural practices, and enhance habitat value on agricultural land.
- b) Support technology advancements and research that improve the environmental sustainability of agricultural management techniques.

Goal AG-3 Support and implement practices that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion on District agricultural lands and within the larger agricultural community.

Policy AG-11 Establish strong working relationships with the agricultural workforce community.

- a) Maintain ongoing communication with organizations that are focused on supporting local agricultural workers, providing a District point of contact, and notifying them of District activities, projects, programs, meetings, and consideration of decisions that may be of interest to ensure opportunities for input.
- b) Periodically attend local community meetings that discuss farm-worker/agricultural workforce interests to better understand agricultural workforce issues and the intersection with District work to inform future activities.
- c) Actively solicit feedback from organizations that are focused on supporting local agricultural workers on proposed new District projects, policies, and programs that may directly affect the community they serve.

Policy AG-12 Implement strategies and actions to further the District's diversity, equity and inclusion ("DEI") goals

Valuing equity, diversity and inclusion is a core District principle that will be practiced and communicated at all levels of the organization. The District's investment in implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion practices encompasses the conservation of agricultural lands and intentionally includes agricultural workers as partners in the work to preserve agricultural lands.

that align with the mission, Board policy, and annual strategic goals and objectives.

- a) Build relationships with community-based organizations that are rooted in and serve the farmworker community.
- b) Incorporate DEI strategies in the solicitation process for agricultural leases.
- c) Provide opportunities to lease District agricultural properties to people who have not traditionally owned or operated ranches and farmlands.
- d) Work with partners to provide training opportunities on (1) environmentally sustainable and resource protective farming and ranching operations and (2) navigating the request for proposals process, both for the purpose of enhancing equitable access to lease opportunities.
- e) Provide non-English translations when appropriate or requested.
- f) Ensure community-based organizations are notified when District leases are up for renewal or when accepting new applications.
- g) Ensure that the broad diversity of agricultural interests have a meaningful opportunity to provide their input in the development of District projects/plans.
- h) Support efforts by Native American tribes to cultivate contemporary and past indigenous ethnobotanical practices and plant uses and reconnect indigenous peoples with cultural land management, natural resource production, and natural stewardship practices.

Policy AG-13 Expand partnerships with local and regional organizations to expand the scale of agricultural land conservation to further protect the surrounding natural resource values.

- a) Cultivate existing partnerships and enter into new partnerships with organizations that support the protection of local agricultural lands to achieve mutual goals and leverage resources.

- b) In the coastside protection area, support partners in efforts to preserve agricultural lands of regional significance through agricultural conservation easements for lands in private ownership and through land trust ownership. (Service Plan PA.3)
- c) Support efforts by partners to implement agriculture sustainability and natural resource conservation projects on private lands that provide a net benefit for the surrounding natural resources. (Service Plan PA.3)

GLOSSARY

Agriculture - encompasses crop and livestock production, aquaculture, and fisheries for food and non-food products.

Agricultural Infrastructure – Improvements made to a property to support an agricultural operation such as fencing, roads, water supply systems and structures.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) – District developed standard practices that identify the preferred manner in which an activity is to be performed in order to be protective of both human health and the environment.

Biodiversity – Describes the natural variety and abundance of plants and animals and the environments in which they live. U.S. Congressional Biodiversity Act, 1990 HR1268, defines biodiversity as “The full range of variety and variability within and among living organisms, and the ecological complexes in which they occur, and encompass ecosystem or community diversity, species diversity and genetic diversity.”

Conservation easement – a voluntary, legal agreement that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. A conservation easement is one option to protect a property for future generations absent of having fee title to that land.

Conservation Grazing - is the intentional use of grazing management to meet resource management objectives including protecting and enhancing habitat for **native** plants and animals that occur in grassland habitat and moderating the negative effects of invasive **exotic** plants on these species.

Ecosystem – An area within the natural environment in which physical (abiotic) factors of the environment, such as rocks and soil,

function together along with interdependent (biotic) organisms, such as plants and animals, within the same habitat.

Enhance – To increase or improve a habitat in value or quality.

Enhancement - the process of altering a habitat to improve one or more specific ecosystem condition(s) and/or function(s).

Environmental Education – A learning process that increases people’s knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action.

Exotic – Species that were not present in the Santa Cruz Mountains region of California prior to the large-scale development of the American continent by European humans prior to 1769.

Habitat – the combination of living and non-living factors that surround and potentially influence an organism, or species’ typical environment.

Historic – Dating from periods post-dating the use of written historical documents. In the American West, the historic period is generally considered to refer to all periods after European exploration and colonization of the region.

Intensive Agriculture - generally refers to maximizing agricultural production on a given area of land with inputs such as labor, fertilizer and machinery. Native plants and animals are typically entirely replaced by row crops, field crops, orchards, or animal production.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) – A long-term strategy that specifically reviews alternatives and monitors conditions to effectively control a target pest with minimum impact to human health, the environment, and non-target organisms.

Invasive Species – animal or plant species that take over sufficiently large areas to reduce biodiversity.

Livestock – The horses, cattle, sheep, and other useful animals kept or raised on a farm or ranch.

Native – Those elements of the natural world occurring within an ecosystem prior to disturbance from an outside event.

Natural – Plant, animal, and microorganism life, native materials, and ecosystem processes that make up the physical world.

Non-Target Organisms – those plants and animals that are not intentionally targeted by a pest management strategy in order to spare benign and often beneficial species.

Open Space – Land and water areas that remain in a natural state and are minimally developed and may include compatible agriculture uses.

Pests – Animals or plants that proliferate beyond natural control and interfere with the natural processes which would otherwise occur on open space lands.

Potential impacts - impacts that cannot be ruled out or confirmed definitively until some future assessment is completed or the work is implemented.

Programming – The regularly scheduled organized, topic-specific presentations or other delivery of information, including community outreach, education, interpretation, and docent led activities, or other special events.

Resource Management – Management of both natural and cultural resources. Natural resource management generally consists

of protecting, restoring, enhancing and monitoring native vegetation and wildlife, and monitoring and protecting the quality of geological and hydrological conditions. Cultural resource management consists of identifying and evaluating archeological sites and cultural landscapes.

Resources – Plants, animals, water, soil, terrain, geologic formations, historic, scenic, and cultural features.

Restoration – The process of returning land that has been degraded and disturbed into functional habitat.

Riparian – Terrestrial environments adjacent to lakes, streams, springs and estuaries where transported surface and subsurface fresh water provides soil moisture for vegetation.

San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area Service Plan - summarizes the services provided by the District and the policies that apply to District activities in the Coastal Annexation Area, which encompasses the lands of coastal San Mateo County generally defined as follows:

- on the east by the existing District boundary and San Francisco **watershed** lands
- on the west by the Pacific Ocean
- on the north by the southern boundary of the City of Pacifica
- on the south by the San Mateo County / Santa Cruz County boundary

Soil – Natural material that covers much of the earth's surface; consisting of rock and mineral particles often mixed with organic matter.

Special Status – Species that are state or federally listed as threatened, rare, endangered, species of special concern, candidate species or those plant species listed by the California Native Plant Society.

Water Quality – The chemical, physical, and biological characteristics of water. Important issues related to forest management include water temperature, nutrients, and sediment inputs.

Watershed – A bounded hydrologic system, where all of the precipitation that falls drains into a single water feature, often a creek or stream.

Wildlife Corridors – Avenues along which wide-ranging animals can travel, plants can propagate, genetic interchange can occur, populations can move in response to environmental changes and natural disasters, and threatened species can be replenished from other areas.

AGRICULTURAL POLICY

BACKGROUND

The public benefits of conserving land as **open space** are many: clean air, clean water, **biodiversity**, climate resiliency and the well-being that comes with spending time in nature.

On the San Mateo County Coast, much of the undeveloped open space land has a long history of agricultural use. Active **agriculture** ~~continues today as is~~ an important essential source of local food and natural products today.

In June 2003, the Board adopted the **San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area (CAA) Service Plan**¹ (Service Plan) to establish the policies, guidelines, and commitments governing District activities and services within coastal San Mateo County, an area known as the Coastsides Protection Area. The San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) approved the CAA in September 2004.

Since LAFCo approval, the District has completed numerous projects related to land purchases², **conservation grazing**, ~~the protection of protecting~~ unique **natural** and scenic **resources**, stream habitat **restoration**, and new public access opportunities. In addition, the District has fostered partnerships and new relationships on the coast and secured grants and other funding to support the preservation and stewardship of coastal open space properties and

In the years 1940 through 1950, San Mateo County was one of California's most productive agricultural regions. As the bayside was developed the remaining agriculture preserved or developed was on the Coastsides, which specialized in crops suitable for the mild coastal climate. Many farmers, ranchers and farmworkers have worked in agriculture for multi-generations on the coast. Today, agriculture faces many pressures including international competition, reduction in regional supporting infrastructure and competition for non-agriculture residential use. Preservation of continued agricultural uses requires partnerships between farmers and ranchers, government agencies and non-profits.

¹ [San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area \(CAA\) Service Plan](#)

working lands. All of this work ~~occurs in~~ recognition of the importance of agriculture ~~in sustaining the local economy and in preserving the rural, open space landscape to the local economy and heritage~~ of the San Mateo County coast. The agricultural policies identified in this document are consistent with the ~~Coastal Service Plan~~, which controls District activities in the Coastal ~~Service Protection~~ Area. These policies also cover ~~Lands outside the coastal service protection area are also covered by these policies unless otherwise noted.~~

The District's mission for the Coastside Protection Area is as follows (bold denotes additions to the basic Mission Statement):

*"To acquire and preserve in perpetuity open space land **and agricultural land of regional significance**, protect and restore the natural environment, **preserve rural character**, **encourage viable agricultural use of land resources**, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education."*

The "viable agricultural use of land resources" is defined as uses that do not deplete natural resources, such as water and soil, that support the agriculture operation, and that the agricultural use is economically viable over the long term.

The District's agricultural conservation work strives to support both agricultural use and protection of natural resources. Conservation that achieves this dual benefit makes up the majority of District agricultural preservation activity, focused on coastal grasslands that support livestock grazing (ranching) and coastal grassland habitats where much of the farming activities occur.

The District considers viable agricultural use of land resources to be those agricultural activities that do not exceed the capacity of the supporting natural resources (e.g., water quality and supply, soil nutrients and structure), do not produce waste products that are persistent, hazardous or toxic to the environment, and is financially profitable—and—sustainable economically feasible for the farmer/rancher. By preserving and supporting agricultural uses on the San Mateo County Coast, the District is working to protect **wild-life corridors**, scenic open space views, groundwater infiltration, and other **ecosystem** and open space benefits in addition to supporting environmentally and financially sustainable agriculture.

As of this writing (2023²), the District has preserved more than over 172,000 acres of open space within the Coastside Protection Area. About 6075% of that land is leased to small-scale ranchers through the District's conservation grazing program to sustain coastal grasslands, one of North America's ~~the~~ most biodiverse and threatened ecosystems ~~in North America~~. Several endangered, threatened and special-status species, like the San Francisco garter

snake, American badger, burrowing owl and California red-legged frog, depend on open grassland habitat and the various stock ponds found within rangeland properties. As the District **enhances** grassland and pond habitats ~~for the~~ benefit of wildlife and ~~to support~~ encourage local agricultural use of land resources, the ecological function of coastal lands is also preserved. Numerous District-owned agricultural lands ~~located~~ outside the Coastal Protection Area are similarly leased to various agricultural operators.

Although the majority of the District's agricultural acreage is in grazing (ranching), the District leases out 130 acres of row crops, vineyards, Christmas tree farms, and orchards to farmers. On the coastside, in accordance with the Coastal Service Plan, the District offers a lease option to tenants/farmers who are conducting agricultural uses on newly acquired coastal lands until the property is sold or a request for proposals for a long-term lease is solicited and a new lease awarded.

Each of the District's agricultural properties requires key infrastructure (water systems, fencing, roads, corrals, and barns) to support an onsite agricultural operation and accomplish the District's land management goals. In particular, conservation grazing often requires fencing to protect creeks, as well as reliable water sources (**livestock** watering) that support the distribution of cattle across the landscape to achieve **resource management** goals.

In general, newly acquired properties have lacked the infrastructure to run a successful conservation grazing program. The District prepares customized Rangeland Management Plans (RMPs) for each new grazing property that sets grazing parameters based on site conditions ~~and like annual rainfall amounts~~ water availability. RMPs include a list of new infrastructure improvements to effectively support the conservation grazing operation.

In addition, the District enters into conservation grazing leases that specify the roles for both the tenant and the District regarding the construction and maintenance of the onsite infrastructure during the lease term. While the District funds most infrastructure improve-

San Mateo County has a diverse assemblage of agricultural production crops that includes indoor (greenhouse 72 acres) and outdoor (420 acres) grown floral and nursery products (the largest economic sector 60%), vegetables, fruits and nuts (1,272 acres, livestock and apiary products and field crops (27,338 acres including 26,258 acres of pasture). [2022 San Mateo County Agricultural Report] Listed in the report but not covered in this policy are forest products, fish catch and cannabis.

Rural character is difficult to define but the coastal service plan describes what needs protection. "The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Board of Directors agrees the agricultural and open space resources along approximately 40 miles of the San Mateo County coast are of national significance and deserve the highest level of stewardship possible. Through these Agricultural Policies, the District endeavors to expand its central mission of natural protection to include agricultural practices that protect the land, its rural agriculture landscapes and way of life.

ments, the District depends on tenants to install portions of the infrastructure (e.g., water troughs, ~~sections of fencing~~ sections) and make maintenance and operational repairs. Additionally, tenants work with the District to eliminate **invasive species** as directed by the District’s Integrated Pest Management program.

These Agricultural Policies are a “living” document that will grow and change regularly, based on new experience and information. Policy language will be reviewed and updated as needed.

AGRICULTURAL GOALS, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Approved by the District Board of Directors in 2003 and by the San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission in 2004, the Coastal Service Plan established the District’s mission of agricultural conservation in the San Mateo County Coastside region as well as the entire suite of open space protection and management services the District provides in the coastal protection area.

Goal AG-1 Continue existing and introduce new agricultural operations within the Coastside Protection Area in order to keep prime agricultural land in agricultural production while ensuring the protection of sensitive natural resources. Maintain agricultural uses outside the Coastal Protection Area when they support open space, natural resource, and/or public access goals. Minimize conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses on District owned or managed lands.

Policy AG-1 In the ~~C~~oastside ~~P~~rotection ~~A~~rea, the fee purchase and protection of agricultural lands will focus on properties that also provide benefits for sensitive **habitat** and natural resource values and/or compatible low intensity recreational opportunities. In the coastside protection area, the preservation of significant agricultural lands without significant natural resource or public access benefits ~~access~~ benefits, such as row ~~crops, should be supported through partnerships and led by partners.~~ crops, should be supported through partnerships and led by partners.

- a) Lands that do not have open space, sensitive habitat, or public access values and which clearly support productive agricultural operations will generally be offered for sale, subject to affirmative agricultural and/or conservation easements, while other agricultural lands, typically rangelands, will generally be offered for lease. (~~Coastal~~Service Plan³ PA.1)
- b) Offer for sale or lease the maximum amount of productive agricultural land to farmers/ranchersgrazers who will actively operate agricultural uses on the land subject to the protection of habitat values and current or planned recreational uses. (Service Plan PA.1)
- c) Focus on purchasing in fee and managing rangelands in perpetuity.
- d) In the coastside protection area, workWork in partnership with organizations like Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) to prevent the conversion or loss of ~~intensive~~ agricultural lands and their natural resource values through funding contributions with the ultimate goal of transferring these lands to private farmers subject to land protections such as agricultural conservation easements.
- e) To the extent practical and if aligned with District policies, keep agricultural uses within the same or contiguous properties together when the agricultural uses are run by the same operator.
- f) When applicable and appropriate, structure agricultural conservation easements to protect the environmental quality, **historic** significance, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and/or open space values of agricultural lands.

*Ensuring compatibility of low-intensity recreation with agricultural activities is a strong focus for the District's management of agricultural open space lands. District public access facilities are typically limited to parking and hiking, bicycling, equestrian trails and limited dog access. Design guidelines consider and minimize the **potential impacts** of trail use to agricultural operations.*

Affirmative agricultural easements are a permanent protection on land that prevents nonagricultural development and requires the landowner to maintain agricultural production on the property. Like other easements, it is recorded on the property title and continues upon sale or transfer.

Policy AG-2 Where compatible with the natural, cultural and agricultural resources located on agricultural lands, provide low-intensity public access and **environmental education**.

³ San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area (CAA) Service Plan

Conservation grazing differs from conventional grazing by considering and minimizing the negative impacts to natural resources and utilizing grazing activity to enhance natural resources. The specific policies defining how the District manages open space through conservation grazing principles are described in the District's Resource Management Policies, Conservation Grazing Management chapter (Chapter XI).

- a) Evaluate the compatibility of low-intensity public access on District-owned agricultural lands to facilitate access and trail connections. (Service Plan PA.3)
- b) Work closely with agricultural tenants to identify appropriate levels of public access through or adjacent to agricultural lands, and the infrastructure, signage, setbacks, buffers, and other measures that improve compatibility and minimize/avoid potential recreational impacts to agricultural uses and vice versa.
- c) Solicit input from landowners, farmers, ranchers and other operators of adjacent agricultural lands to inform the development of use and management plans for District lands. (Service Plan Guidelines G.3.8 and G.6.3)
- d) Locate trails, trailhead access points, parking and other visitor-serving facilities on District lands in harmony with the surrounding agricultural uses, where the siting of facilities and buffers in the coastal protection area are consistent with the Coastal Service Plan and EIR mitigation measures, while complying with current regulatory requirements. (Service Plan Guideline G.3.9)
- e) Solicit input from other local public agencies, conservation organizations, non-profit entities, and community groups to inform the placement of public trails and other low-intensity public access facilities that traverse or are located adjacent to agricultural lands. (Service Plan Guideline G.8)
- f) Implement temporary closures of specific trails that are located on agricultural lands to facilitate intermittent agricultural activities and protect visitor safety, as may be necessary (e.g., calving season, transportation of livestock, crop harvest, chemical applications, etc.). (Service Plan Guideline G.3.4)

Policy AG-3 Retain current District agricultural housing and expand agricultural housing opportunities when feasible to further District goals.

- a) Consider opportunities to partner with and support local organizations that provide affordable regional agricultural workforce housing when such partnerships help further District goals.

b) Consider partnerships to develop and manage agricultural workforce housing on District lands in appropriate locations that do not conflict with natural resource protection and/or ecologically sensitive public access goals. In general, open space lands do not provide sustainable housing development locations and new housing would be limited to specific circumstances in disturbed areas with existing infrastructure.

b)c) Prioritize the leasing of District residences, that are needed to support an agricultural operation located on District lands, to the grazing operator/lessee or farm/ranch worker who is actively farming or grazing on District the land unless otherwise essential for operational needs as District employee housing. (Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy⁴)land.

d) Farm Worker Housing- Provide discounted rates for District housing that is occupied by a non-lease holding farm/ranch employee/s who is supporting an agricultural operation on District land.

e) Agricultural Operator (Lease Holder) Housing- Rent District housing at prevailing rental market rates for lease holders. (Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy)

Policy AG-4 Provide necessary infrastructure and incentives to support and improve agricultural operations, where appropriate.

Identify future investments in fencing infrastructure on District agricultural lands to establish property boundaries and protect natural resources and neighboring lands. (Resource Management Policies⁵ CGM-2, CGM-5)

a) Develop water infrastructure to support agricultural operations that also maintains and protects where natural resource values. (co-benefits also exist. (See Resource Management Policies CGM-2)

***Agricultural infrastructure** is critical to sustainable and environmentally responsible agricultural production and land management. Water infrastructure and supply is a critical limiting factor, fencing is essential, and structures such as corrals and barns are necessary. Historically, the high cost of constructing and maintaining these facilities, led to an under investment in infrastructure. Upgrading infrastructure for current use often benefits both the agricultural business and the natural resources through efficiency improvements and reduced footprint.*

⁴ Board Policy 4.11: Housing Policy

⁵ Resource Management Policies

Tenant-in-good-standing is an assessment of how well a tenant complies with lease terms and specified land management objectives laid out in rangeland management plans or agriculture production plans.

- b) Improve water security/supply, efficiency, and resiliency to drought for District-owned residences on agricultural lands. (Resource Management Policies (See WR-5))
- c) Work with tenants to maintain or improve agricultural structures such as barns and corrals.
- d) Allow tenant-funded infrastructure improvements that support **intensive agriculture** if they do not have significant impacts on natural resources, rural character or public access.
- e) Prioritize investment in water infrastructure that has with direct natural resource benefit, such as distributing water to improve grazing management and livestock rotation in grassland habitats, or investing in water storage and distribution to reduce reliance on in-stream water use, and the improvement or creation of stock ponds that also provide critical habitat.

Policy AG-5 Structure agricultural leases ~~Utilize lease structures~~ to accomplish land management objectives and establish leases that promote conservation goals and balanced with the financial/economically viable viability of agricultural uses and operations ~~operations~~.

- a) ~~In~~ On the coastside protection area, in accordance with the Coastal Service Plan, after the purchase of active agricultural lands, the land shall be subject to continued use by the existing agricultural operator until such time as the District either sells the property or issues a request for proposals and awards a new long-term agricultural lease. (~~Coastal~~ Service Plan PA.1)
- b) After the acquisition of a property and the development of an agriculture production plan or rangeland management plan, solicit a request for proposals to enter into a new long-term lease for agricultural lands.
- b)c) At the end of the long-term lease, resolicit a request for proposals to enter into a new long-term lease.

d) Long term leases shall be structured with periodic options to allow renewal or ending the lease and provisions for terminating leases for poor performance or violations of lease terms.

~~e) e)~~ Enter into agricultural leases with term durations that support the financial viability of agricultural operations ~~and so as to~~ promote tenant investments that are beneficial for the land and the agricultural production; the lease term length should be based on the type of agricultural operation. (Resource Management Policies CGM-5)

~~d) f)~~ Work with local organizations to ensure that agricultural lease opportunities are well publicized, including to new/early-career producers and agricultural workers.

~~e) g)~~ When soliciting for new agricultural tenants, include selection criteria pertaining to local preference, Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (DEI), tenant in-good-standing, and environmental sustainability as well as the ability to manage and operate the agricultural operation. ~~(see AG-10)~~

~~h)~~ When awarding leases, the District shall factor in the performance of existing/prior agricultural tenants, including their stewardship practices, implementation of Board-approved resource management plans/actions, accommodation of low intensity public access, and use of sustainability practices in their agricultural operations.

~~f) i)~~ ~~Based on site conditions and suitability, e~~ Consider setting aside some appropriate leases for the purpose of providing an opportunity for farm workers and communities that have not typically had opportunities to lease and operate agricultural operations.

Agritourism links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors to the San Mateo County Coastside and/or individual agricultural properties in the region. Examples are local sales of agricultural products on site or through farmers markets, u-pick sites, and fairs or festivals celebrating agriculture such as the pumpkin festival.

Policy AG-6 Ensure that marketing and promotion of agricultural products produced on District lands are compatible with resource protection policies. Allow District tenants to market and promote their products on District lands and support regional efforts that promote local food sources as a sustainable approach to feeding Bay Area residents. Provide and support regional

The District manages its water resources for ecological biological, and agricultural uses. Climate change impacts and increased consumptive uses will strain supplies, and careful management will be needed to meet the competing needs of agriculture and wildlife during drought conditions. Agricultural management prescriptions such as stocking rates on grazed lands are variable dependent on seasonal rainfall. In addition, investment in off-stream storage or utilization of wells and springs rather than stream diversions can enhance fish and wildlife habitat viability by reducing impacts on in-stream water flow in the summer.

education opportunities that raise awareness of environmental benefits related to agricultural land protection and management.

- a) Allow marketing of events and appropriate ~~use of~~ signage ~~and events~~ by tenants to develop brand identity and promote their products on District lands. Require signage to include identification of the District as the landowner.
- b) Communicate and educate the public on the environmental benefits of agricultural uses on District lands, the District's coastal mission, the history of agriculture on the San Mateo Coast in protecting rural character and the natural resources, the grassland management benefits of conservation grazing, and the protection of natural resources on agricultural lands via programming, signing, the ~~on the~~ website and ~~through~~ social media.
- c) Allow appropriate use of pictures of District landscapes by District tenants to promote their products.
- d) Allow District tenants to include mention of their status as an agricultural tenant who operates on District lands as part of their marketing and promotional materials; grazers who are part of the conservation grazing program can also mention their participation in the program and the benefits of grazing in protecting the natural resources.

Goal AG-2 Sustain and promote environmental health and encourage environmentally sensitive and sustainable agriculture.

Policy AG-7 Encourage environmentally sensitive and sustainable agricultural practices on District lands that preserve and protect water quality and **riparian** habitats.

- a) Manage agricultural leases and easements to ~~maximize~~ optimize the protection and **enhancement** of riparian areas, water

quality, and quantity of water available for natural resources. (Resource Management Policies WR-2).

- b) Secure water rights for District agricultural lands to support the viability of agricultural uses while remaining protective of sensitive habitats (Service Plan PA.2).
- c) Phase in the installation of water meters or other measures to monitor ~~annual~~ consumptive water use (Resource Management Policies WR-4) for agricultural activities to balance ~~con-~~
~~sumption~~ with supply and to promote healthy ecological function.
- d) Develop, regularly update and implement **Best Management Practices** for efficient use of water by agricultural tenants.
- e) Identify and replace diversions that strain water sources, especially those that significantly impact **special status** species, with other reliable sources (e.g., wells, retention ponds, etc.) (Resource Management Policies WR-8).
- f) Evaluate and alter, as feasible, water-intensive land management practices during drought conditions to reduce overall District-wide water consumption (Resource Management Policies WR-8).

Policy AG-8 Encourage environmentally sensitive practices on District lands that enhance the benefits and/or reduce negative impacts to the natural resources.

- a) Locate agricultural activities, facility development, and trail construction away from sensitive resource areas to the greatest extent possible and otherwise incorporate measures to reduce potential resource impacts (Resource Management Policies GS-2).
- b) Manage **pests** on agricultural properties to protect surrounding natural resources while also protecting human health and supporting existing agricultural uses through an **integrated pest management program**. (Resource Management Policies IPM-1).

Farmers utilize many different agricultural practices when deciding how to produce crops. Regenerative agriculture is one approach that has been adopted by several ranchers and farmers on the coastside, which is a conservation and rehabilitation approach to food and farming systems that has many practices consistent with the District's land management mission. Through these practices, farmers and ranchers focus on the soil ecosystems to increase biodiversity and enhance ecosystem services.

- c) Take appropriate actions to prevent the introduction of new pest species to District preserves, especially new invasive plants in natural areas, rangelands, and agricultural properties (Resource Management Policies IPM-2).
- d) Provide technical support and incentives for tenants to implement environmentally sensitive, natural resource-protective practices on District lands and support regional programs that promote environmentally sensitive, natural resource-protective agricultural practices.
- e) Promote integrated pest management agricultural production methods.
- f) Prohibit uses incompatible with natural resource protection or the District's mission, including agriculture production primarily contained within structures such as greenhouses or feed lots and cultivation of cannabis.

Policy AG-9 Promote climate resiliency and encourage environmentally sustainable agricultural practices on District lands that store carbon and promote soil and grassland health

- a) Support soil health improvement practices and cultivation of climatically appropriate crops on District lands that are also protective of the surrounding natural resources.
- b) Promote practices that enhance carbon storage where these practices are compatible with other natural resource protection.
- c) Offer and/or sponsor educational opportunities for tenant farmers/ranchers and farmworkers/ranch workers regarding sustainable farm and conservation grazing operational practices that are protective of the natural resources.

Policy AG-10 Support research focused on agricultural practices that increase environmentally sustainable use of land resources, climate adaptation, and/or increase habitat values on agricultural lands

- a) Invest in research of new techniques that improve resource use efficiencies to further expand the protection of natural resources, reduce **non-target** natural resource impacts of agricultural practices, and enhance habitat value on agricultural land.
- b) Support technology advancements and research that improve the environmental sustainability of agricultural management techniques.

Goal AG-3 Support and implement practices that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion on District agricultural lands and within the larger agricultural community.

Policy AG-11 Establish strong working relationships with the agricultural workforce community.

- a) Maintain ongoing communication with organizations that are focused on supporting local agricultural workers, [providing a District point of contact, and](#) notifying them of District activities, projects, programs, meetings, and consideration of decisions that may be of interest to ensure opportunities for input.
- b) Periodically attend local community meetings that discuss farm-worker/agricultural workforce interests to better understand agricultural workforce issues and the intersection with District work to inform future activities.
- c) Actively solicit feedback from organizations that are focused on supporting local agricultural workers on proposed new District projects, policies, and programs that may directly affect the community they serve.

Policy AG-12 Implement strategies and actions to further the District's diversity, equity and inclusion ("DEI") goals

Valuing equity, diversity and inclusion is a core District principle that will be practiced and communicated at all levels of the organization. The District's investment in implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion practices encompasses the conservation of agricultural lands and intentionally includes agricultural workers as partners in the work to preserve agricultural lands.

that align with the mission, Board policy, and annual strategic goals and objectives.

- a) Build relationships with community-based organizations that are rooted in and serve the farmworker community.
- b) Incorporate DEI strategies in the solicitation process for agricultural leases.
- c) Provide opportunities to lease District agricultural properties to people who have not traditionally owned or operated ranches and farmlands.
- e)d) Work with partners to provide training opportunities on (1) environmentally sustainable and resource protective farming and ranching operations and (2) navigating the request for proposals process, both for the purpose of enhancing equitable access to lease opportunities.
- e)e) Provide non-English translations when appropriate or requested.
- e)f) Ensure community-based organizations are notified when District leases are up for renewal or when accepting new applications.
- f)g) Ensure that the broad diversity of agricultural interests have a meaningful opportunity to provide their input in the development of District projects/plans.
- h) Support efforts by Native American tribes to cultivate contemporary and past indigenous ethnobotanical practices and plant uses and reconnect indigenous peoples with cultural land management, natural resource production, and natural stewardship practices.

Policy AG-139 Expand partnerships with local and regional organizations to expand the scale of agricultural land conservation to further protect the surrounding natural resource values.

- a) Cultivate~~Expand~~ existing partnerships and enter into new partnerships with organizations that support the protection of local

~~agriculture~~ agricultural lands to achieve mutual goals and leverage resources.

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Exotic – Species that were not present in the Santa Cruz Mountains region of California prior to the large scale development of the American continent by European humans prior to 1769.

Habitat – the combination of living and non-living factors that surround and potentially influence an organism; or species’ typical environment.

Historic – Dating from periods post-dating the use of written historical documents. In the American West, the historic period is generally considered to refer to all periods after European exploration and colonization of the region.

Intensive Agriculture - generally refers to maximizing agricultural production on a given area of land with inputs such as labor, fertilizer and machinery. Native plants and animals are typically entirely replaced by row crops, field crops, orchards, or animal production.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) – A long-term strategy that specifically reviews alternatives and monitors conditions to effectively control a target pest with minimum impact to human health, the environment, and non-target organisms.

Invasive Species – animal or plant species that take over sufficiently large areas to reduce biodiversity.

Livestock – The horses, cattle, sheep, and other useful animals kept or raised on a farm or ranch.

Native – Those elements of the natural world occurring within an ecosystem prior to disturbance from an outside event.

Natural – Plant, animal, and microorganism life, native materials, and ecosystem processes that make up the physical world.

Non-Target Organisms – those plants and animals that are not intentionally targeted by a pest management strategy in order to spare benign and often beneficial species.

Open Space – Land and water areas that remain in a natural state and are minimally developed, and may include compatible agriculture uses.

Pests – Animals or plants that proliferate beyond natural control and interfere with the natural processes which would otherwise occur on open space lands.

Potential impacts - impacts that cannot be ruled out or confirmed definitively until some future assessment is completed or the work is implemented.

Programming – The regularly scheduled organized, topic-specific presentations or other delivery of information, including community outreach, education, interpretation, and docent led activities, or other special events.

Resource Management – Management of both natural and cultural resources. Natural resource management generally consists

of protecting, restoring, enhancing and monitoring native vegetation and wildlife, and monitoring and protecting the quality of geological and hydrological conditions. Cultural resource management consists of identifying and evaluating archeological sites and cultural landscapes.

Resources – Plants, animals, water, soil, terrain, geologic formations, historic, scenic, and cultural features.

Restoration – The process of returning land that has been degraded and disturbed into functional habitat.

Riparian – Terrestrial environments adjacent to lakes, streams, springs and estuaries where transported surface and subsurface fresh water provides soil moisture for vegetation.

San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area Service Plan - summarizes the services provided by the District and the policies that apply to District activities in the Coastal Annexation Area, which encompasses the lands of coastal San Mateo County generally defined as follows:

- on the east by the existing District boundary and San Francisco **watershed** lands
- on the west by the Pacific Ocean
- on the north by the southern boundary of the City of Pacifica
- on the south by the San Mateo County / Santa Cruz County boundary

Soil – Natural material that covers much of the earth's surface; consisting of rock and mineral particles often mixed with organic matter.

Special Status – Species that are state or federally listed as threatened, rare, endangered, species of special concern, candidate species or those plant species listed by the California Native Plant Society.

Water Quality – The chemical, physical, and biological characteristics of water. Important issues related to forest management include water temperature, nutrients, and sediment inputs.

Watershed – A bounded hydrologic system, where all of the precipitation that falls drains into a single water feature, often a creek or stream.

Wildlife Corridors – Avenues along which wide-ranging animals can travel, plants can propagate, genetic interchange can occur, populations can move in response to environmental changes and natural disasters, and threatened species can be replenished from other areas.

Summary of Stakeholder and Peer-Agency Comments on Draft Agricultural Policy Language

Local Stake Holder Group Feedback

San Mateo Farm Bureau. April 02, 2023, in person

- The policy should be flexible to accommodate changing agricultural technologies and practices as they arise.
- Policy is written to prioritize natural resource protection. Ag. has an impact and this should be minimized but not appropriate to seek “no” impact since some impact is inherent
- Data/information from research or monitoring needs to be communicated back to the agricultural tenants
- District should conduct research on brush management strategies
- Neighbor relationships and preserve partnerships should be added to the policy

Aydando Latinos A Sonar (ALAS) March 23, 2023, group call

- Clarification on how people get into Midpen ag leases (AG-5).
- Farm workers need to be able to become farmers to improve equity and sustainability in the agricultural sector.
- Would like to partner with Midpen on training farmworkers to become farmers, possibly including access to Midpen land (*identify "start up" leases).
- Given typically low wages of farm workers, access to affordable housing is critical

Puente de la Costa Sur February 23, 2023, virtual.

- Housing need for farm workers is a critical aspect of agricultural preservation and the vitality of agricultural communities.
- Agricultural housing limitation is also a major social justice and equity issue since people of color and low-income families are disproportionately affected.
- It can be valuable to have housing options for farm workers that are independent of their employers.
- Interested in providing input on DEI criteria in RFPs
- Interested in help (land) to develop owner built single family housing

Farmworker Affairs Coalition May 03, 2023, virtual.

- How is housing use prioritized when Midpen acquires lands that has housing?
- Is there Midpen land that could be suitable for a housing project after “cutting through some of the red tape”?
- What has been the “farmworker voice” in the development of the policy?
- Could Midpen provide financial support for a potential master plan for Pescadero?
- The policy calls out consideration of DEI in the lease process but does not identify specific criteria.

Farmworker Advisory Commission May 10, 2023, in person – Half Moon Bay Library

- Clarification on typical Midpen housing.
- What kind of feedback have we heard from other community groups?
- It would be helpful to do outreach specifically within the farmworker community regarding lease opportunities.
- Consider programs to help farmworkers who want to become farmers (training, access to land etc.).
- The policies around ag. practices are very important, but it is also important to include the efforts to protect and restore the environment. These should be integrated and include the people who are working the land.

San Mateo Food Systems Alliance April 25, 2023, virtual.

- Appreciate AG9
- How would AG9 be implemented?

Sustainable Pescadero March 01, 2023, group call.

- How will Midpen balance ag land use and public access?
- Concern about increased Midpen presence leading to increased visitation and associated impact on community.
- Could Midpen support housing on non-Midpen lands? How?
- Emphasize cultural landscape, community, and history.
- Include acknowledgement of people who were displaced during WWII and migrated to coastal San Mateo County
- Pescadero is lacking resources and funding to support major planning effort. Could Midpen support this?

Conservation Council May 04, 2023, virtual.

- Consider efforts to reduce agricultural plastic wastes
- Has Midpen considered running the conservation grazing program with District-owned cows rather than leases with commercial operators?

San Mateo Agricultural Advisory Committee May 08, 2023, hybrid (virtual-in person)

- Concern about public access and food safety
- Clarify the terms “local” and “regional” in terms of housing needs. Emphasis should be on support for local agricultural housing.
- Clarify the term “viable agricultural use” and consider how changes in technology or resource availability might change how we interpret viable agricultural use.
- Concern about how increased Midpen presence could lead to increased traffic and visitation impacts.
- There is need for education to raise awareness of importance of agricultural communities and challenges to them.
- Consider baseline traffic study
- Will ag policy go through analysis under CEQA?

Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council April 04, 2023, in person/virtual hybrid, Pescadero and July 19, 2023, Pescadero

- Consider how Midpen can help support agricultural communities beyond the lands Midpen owns (i.e. other businesses and services that are vital to the ag. community)
- Ron Sturgeon attending as a community member commented that Midpen is not carrying out this process in good faith and has not been responsive to input from the Farm Bureau nor adequately consulted with the Farm Bureau.
- Consider possibility of opening the La Honda Equestrian Center to more uses.
- Meeting concluded with a request to schedule a follow up meeting focused on the ag policy.

San Mateo Resource Conservation District, Ag Commissioner's Office, Natural Resources Conservation Service (group meeting) March 23, 2023, in person/virtual hybrid

- Clarification on who local partners are.
- Consider buffer zones that might be needed for public access a round row crops when pesticides are applied.
- Clarification on d and e under AG-3 district housing.
- Important for ag producers to have leases long enough to see return on investments and be eligible for some assistance programs (at least 5 years).
- Define climate appropriate crops (perhaps in sidebar)

Peninsula Open Space Trust, September 11, 2023, email

- Clarification on uses of District funding contributions to purchase and preservation of agricultural lands
- Consider use of 'optimize' rather than 'maximize' in policy language regarding protection and use of water for both agricultural and natural resource values
- Clarification that economic benefit of agricultural preservation is also applicable to the communities (as well as agricultural producer).

Peer Agency Feedback on Review of Draft Agricultural Policy August 2023.

Background

As part of the stakeholder feedback and review process, staff shared current draft agricultural policy language with peer agencies and other organizations that work at the interface of open space and agricultural preservation in the Bay Area. Representatives of these organizations provided feedback early in the policy development process at an agricultural policy workshop held on November 20, 2019. Most contacts responded with appreciation for Midpen's work on the policy and for the opportunity to review the draft. Below is a list of peer agencies that were part of this outreach and a summary of feedback from those who provided commentary.

Full List of Peer Agencies (The asterisk (*) indicates those that responded with more lengthy feedback):

- California State Parks
- Coastside Land Trust
- East Bay Regional Parks District

- Marin Agricultural Land Trust*
- Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE)
- San Mateo County Planning
- Santa Clara County Parks
- Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority*
- Sonoma Agriculture and Open Space District*
- TomKat Ranch Education Foundation
- University of California Cooperative Extension*

Highlights from peer agency feedback:

Marin Agricultural Land Trust

- Highlighted the importance of the idea that policies are a living document to be reviewed and updated periodically.

Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority

- More could be said about the role of agriculture in providing wildlife corridors. It's touched on in the policy, but perhaps more text in the discussions of riparian buffers could make that clear.
- More could be said about the various social realities of farmers, particularly land tenure. Housing gets a shoutout, but there's a lot of great work around the challenges farmers face and I think the policy could probably be a little more futuristic in its consideration of those issues.
- Preserving agriculture is a big deal for climate, by keeping vehicle miles down and increase our local food.
- Food security – why encourage viable agricultural use of the land if not to provide communities with reliable access to nourishing foods? I'd see this up earlier than in Ag-6, maybe in the introductory paragraphs. You might make food security its own thing and not just a marketing thing.
- Policy AG-1—you might say "... In the coastside protection area, the preservation of significant agricultural lands without significant natural resource **and** public access benefits..." because you could easily run into situations where there are great farms without much habitat that offer excellent public access opportunities like farmstands or farm trails.

Sonoma Agriculture and Open Space District

- P5 (AG-1-e): I'm not entirely sure what this would mean in terms of specific actions – for example, would this mean that MidPen would aim to buy multiple contiguous properties if they were all operated by the same operator? Give preference to a person who wanted to lease a property if they operate an adjacent property? Apply the same restrictions or allowed uses to contiguous properties?

- P6 (AG-3-e): I'm curious why the discount described in (d) wouldn't also be applicable to lease holders as well as employees?

University of California Cooperative Extension

- I'm really pleased to see that MidPen has a commitment to maintain and provide housing when available/feasible. I think this is a significant shift from past public agency policies that seemed set on removing all structures from open space with no regard for where those stewarding lands should live.
- I also appreciate that the policy clearly recognizes the need for maintaining and developing grazing infrastructure.