5.2 AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

This section of the program EIR evaluates the potential for implementation of the SUP to impact agriculture and forest resources in the District. The section discusses plans and policies from several jurisdictional agencies, the existing agricultural resources throughout the SUP area, and possible environmental impacts that may occur during future phases of the SUP and site-specific projects implemented under the SUP.

TERMINOLOGY

California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP):\(^1\)

**Prime Farmland (P).** Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features and able to sustain long-term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

**Farmland of Statewide Importance (S).** Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

**Unique Farmland (U).** Farmland of lesser-quality soils used for the production of the state’s leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards, as found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been cultivated at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.

**Farmland of Local Importance (L).** Land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county’s board of supervisors and a local advisory committee. In some counties, Confined Animal Agriculture facilities are part of Farmland of Local Importance, but they are shown separately.

**Grazing Land (G).** Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock. This category was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen’s Association, University of California Cooperative Extension, and other groups interested in the extent of grazing activities.

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

The Rural Land Mapping Project provides more detail on the distribution of various land uses within the Other Land category in nine FMMP counties, including all eight San Joaquin Valley counties. The project may be expanded to the entire FMMP survey area as funding becomes available. The Rural Land categories include:

5. Environmental Analysis
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

- Rural Residential Land (R)
- Semi-Agricultural and Rural Commercial Land (sAC)
- Vacant or Disturbed Land (V)
- Confined Animal Agriculture (Cl): status of this land use relative to Farmland of Local Importance.
- Nonagricultural or Natural Vegetation (nv)

Water (W). Perennial water bodies with an extent of at least 40 acres.

OPTIONAL DESIGNATION. Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use. This category was developed in cooperation with local government planning departments and county boards of supervisors during the public workshop phase of the FMMP’s development in 1982. Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use information is available both statistically and as an overlay to the important farmland information. Land Committed to Nonagricultural Use is defined as existing farmland, grazing land, and vacant areas which have a permanent commitment for development.

Forest land is defined as “land that can support 10-percent native tree cover of any species, including hardwoods, under natural conditions, and that allows for management of one or more forest resources, including timber, aesthetics, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, recreation, and other public benefits”.

Timberland is defined as “land...which is available for, and capable of, growing a crop of trees of any commercial species used to produce lumber and other forest products, including Christmas trees”.

Timberland production zone is defined as an area which has been zoned pursuant to Section 51112 or 51113 and is devoted to and used for growing and harvesting timber, or for growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses. Compatible uses include management for watershed; management for fish and wildlife habitat or hunting and fishing; a use integrally related to the growing, harvesting and processing of forest products, including but not limited to roads, log landings, and log storage areas; the erection, construction, alteration, or maintenance of gas, electric, water, or communication transmission facilities; grazing; and a residence or other structure necessary for the management of land zoned as timberland production.

Timber is trees grown for forest products requiring the harvesting of trees, such as wood for construction and carpentry, and wood pulp used in making paper and corrugated board (cardboard).

---

2 California Public Resources Code Section 12220(g).
3 California Public Resources Code Section 4526.
4 California Government Code Sections 51104(g) and 51104(h).
5.2.1 Environmental Setting

5.2.1.1 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

State laws and regulations are summarized below. The following regulatory framework discussion does not include all plans and policies that relate to agriculture and forestry resources in the District. Although some of these may not directly applicable to the SUP or site-specific projects implemented under the SUP, they are included to assist in identifying potential impacts and significance thresholds. See Applicable Regulations and Standard Conditions at end of this chapter for those that require District compliance.

State

California Government Code, Section 65570

The California Department of Conservation (DOC) established the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP [see below]) in 1982 to identify critical agricultural lands and track the conversion of these lands to other uses. The FMMP is a nonregulatory program and provides a consistent and impartial analysis of agricultural land use and land use changes throughout California.

County, state, and federal agencies have established several classifications of important agricultural land based on factors such as soil characteristics, climate, and water supply (see “Terminology,” above); categories of mapped agricultural land are set forth in California Public Resources Code Section 21060.1.5

Through the Important Farmland maps and related databases, DOC maintains an ongoing inventory of farmland and projects that convert farmland to urban and other uses.6,7 DOC tracks the status of farmlands through the following procedures:

- Maps and statistics are produced biannually using a process that integrates infrared aerial photos provided by NASA, standard aerial photos, field mapping, a computerized mapping system, and public review.
- Maps compile soil survey and current land use information from the USDA and Natural Resource Conservation Service to represent an inventory of agricultural resources within each county.
- Based on these maps, DOC evaluates land to determine its farmland designation, and flags fallow parcels.
- In order to qualify as Prime Farmland rather than just prime soil, the land must have irrigation as well as prime soil attributes.

5. Environmental Analysis

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

- DOC has a minimum mapping unit of 10 acres, with parcels smaller than 10-acres being absorbed into the surrounding classifications.

Once DOC designates land as prime farmland, local governments may limit the use of this land to agriculture or similar types of open space.

Senate Bill 850

Senate Bill 850 - Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Law (LESA) is an approach for rating the relative quality of land resources based on specific measurable features. The formulation of a California Agricultural LESA Model is the result of Senate Bill 850 (Chapter 812/1993), which charges the Resources Agency, in consultation with the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, with developing an amendment to Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines concerning agricultural lands. Such an amendment is intended “to provide lead agencies with an optional methodology to ensure that significant effects on the environment of agricultural land conversions are quantitatively and consistently considered in the environmental review process.” Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines states that “in determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland.”

The California LESA Model is based on a 100-point scale. The LESA score has two parts, the Land Evaluation (LE) Factors score, which rates the soil in relation to agriculture, and the Site Assessment (SA) Factors score, which rates all remaining factors as they pertain to agriculture. A detailed LESA analysis is not practicable at the scale of the District. However, methods and criteria from the LESA Model are used where applicable, and discussed qualitatively, in the impacts analysis in this Section.

California Government Code Sections 51200 et seq.

The California Land Conservation Act—commonly referred to as the Williamson Act—was adopted initially by the State of California in 1965. The act was established to encourage the preservation of agricultural lands in view of the increasing trend toward their “premature and unnecessary” urbanization. The act enables counties and cities to designate agricultural preserves (Williamson Act lands) and offer preferential taxation to agricultural landowners based on the income-producing value. In return for the preferential tax rate, the landowner is required to sign a contract with the county or city agreeing not to develop the land for a minimum of 10 years. The contract is renewed automatically on its anniversary date unless a notice of nonrenewal or petition for cancellation is filed. Partial replacement of local property tax revenue by the

---

8 Chapter 812, Statutes of 1993; California Public Resources Code, Section 21095.
9 California Government Code Sections 51200 et. seq.
5. Environmental Analysis

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

state, termed Open Space Subventions, were eliminated from the state budget for fiscal year 2012; however, existing Williamson Act contracts remain in effect.\(^\text{11}\)

**California Government Code Sections 53094(b) and 65402(b)**

Even where schools are not permitted or are conditionally permitted under local land use law, school districts ultimately have the authority to render general plan and zoning requirements inapplicable.\(^\text{12}\) If the local agency disapproves the location, purpose, or extent of the school use as being not in conformity with the general plan, the school district may nonetheless overrule the disapproval.\(^\text{13}\) A school district’s governing body may render a local agency’s general plan or zoning ordinance inapplicable by a two-thirds vote.\(^\text{14}\) The school district’s governing body must notify the affected city or county of such an action within 10 days of the action. This vote may be taken at any point in the process. Thus, under State law, the fact that a proposed LAUSD school project is inconsistent with a local general plan or zoning ordinance will not necessarily prevent LAUSD from proceeding with that project.

5.2.1.2 **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

**Regional Setting**

*Agriculture in Los Angeles County*

The total dollar value of agricultural production in Los Angeles County in 2012 was $189.9 million. The top five agricultural commodities by dollar value in 2012 were nursery production, vegetable crops, field crops, fruit and nut crops, and livestock production. The total acreage in agricultural production was 21,563 acres, or about 33.7 square miles.\(^\text{15}\) Most mapped important farmland in Los Angeles County is outside of the District in the northern part of the county—in the Antelope Valley, part of the Mojave Desert.\(^\text{16}\) Los Angeles County produced the greatest agricultural production of any county in the United States from 1910 to about 1955.\(^\text{17}\)

**District Setting**

*Mapped Farmland*

Most of the District is urbanized and is not mapped on the California Important Farmland Finder (CIFF) maintained by the FMMP.\(^\text{18}\) However, the west half of the San Fernando Valley, and part of the northern San Fernando Valley, are mapped on the CIFF. Several small areas of prime farmland are scattered around the San

---


\(^{12}\) Government Code Sections 53094 and 65402.

\(^{13}\) Government Code Section 65402 (c).


5. Environmental Analysis
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

Fernando Valley. The total amount of mapped important farmland in the District, approximately 465 acres (301 acres of Prime Farmland and 164 acres of Unique Farmland; see Figure 5.2-1, Farmland Map), is about 0.1 percent of the District’s total area. Nearly all of the Prime Farmland in the District is in five areas: Sepulveda Dam Recreation Area; the campus of Los Angeles Pierce College, a community college; the north end of the Van Nuys Airport property; Orcutt Ranch Horticultural Center, a Los Angeles City Park; and Forneris Farms, a fruit and vegetable growing operation. All five locations are in the City of Los Angeles in the San Fernando Valley. Most of the Unique Farmland in the District is in transmission line easements in the City of Los Angeles in the San Fernando Valley. 19

Williamson Act Contracts

There are no Williamson Act Contracts that affect land in the District; the only Williamson Act contracts in Los Angeles County are on Santa Catalina Island. 20

Agricultural Uses

Mapped important farmland in the District was checked using Google Earth satellite view in May 2013. Some of the areas showed parallel rows appearing to be row crop agriculture; some were bright green but without distinct rows, suggesting grass crop agriculture; and some appeared to be vacant land.

Some commercial agricultural uses may exist in the District outside of mapped important farmland. However, most of the District is in intensely urbanized areas, and it is thus unlikely that there are substantial areas in agricultural use in the District apart from mapped important farmland.

All LAUSD schools are developed as schools, even schools that are presently closed. Analysis of agricultural uses under CEQA focuses on impacts to commercial agricultural operations. 21 Thus, while substantial numbers of LAUSD schools may contain small school gardens for educational purposes—comparable to community gardens—such school gardens are not considered agricultural uses for the purpose of CEQA analysis.

19 Division of Land Resource Protection (DLRP). California Important Farmland Finder. http://maps.conservation.ca.gov/ciff/ciff.html. The Sepulveda Dam Recreation Area is at the northwest corner of the junction of the I-405 and US 101 freeways. Los Angeles Pierce College is along the south side of Victory Boulevard from Winnetka Avenue on the east to De Soto Avenue on the west. The referenced part of the Van Nuys Airport property is at the northeast corner of Roscoe Boulevard and Havenhurst Avenue. Orcutt Ranch Horticultural Center is at the southeast corner of Roscoe Boulevard and March Avenue. Forneris Farms is on the south side of Rinaldi Street straddling Alemany Way.
5. Environmental Analysis

Figure 5.2-1 Mapped Farmland

Source: California Department of Conservation, 2010
5. Environmental Analysis
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

This page intentionally left blank.
5. Environmental Analysis
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

Forest Land

There is no forest land on or next to existing LAUSD schools. Montane hardwood forest and/or woodland vegetation occurs in the San Gabriel Mountains. At lower elevations, montane hardwood overstory species typically include oaks, white alder, bigleaf maple, bigcone Douglas fir, and California laurel. Understory vegetation usually is dominated by chaparral species such as coffeeberry, manzanita, and ceanothus. A wide variety of wildlife relies on this habitat, including jays, woodpeckers, squirrel, black bear, mule deer, and various reptiles and amphibians. Coastal oak woodland occurs next to the north side of Topanga Elementary Charter School in the Community of Topanga in unincorporated Los Angeles County. Coastal oak woodland occurs on flat to steep slopes that often face northwest at low elevations—between 105 to 2,851 feet. It is dominated by coast live oak in the tree layer, with various species of shrubs and annual grassland in the understory.

5.2.2 Thresholds of Significance

CEQA THRESHOLDS

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

AG-1 Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use.

AG-2 Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract.

AG-3 Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g)).

AG-4 Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

AG-5 Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use.

---


5.2.3 Environmental Impacts

ANALYTIC METHODOLOGY

Locations of mapped important farmland were identified using the California Important Farmland Finder mapped by the Division of Land Resource Protection. Existing conditions on and surrounding mapped farmland were identified using Google Maps and Google Earth. Existing schools near mapped important farmland were identified using a geographic information systems (“GIS”) data layer from the District.

The applicable thresholds are identified in brackets after the impact statement.

Impact 5.2-1: The SUP would not result in conversion of mapped farmland to nonagricultural uses. [Threshold AG-1]

New Construction on New Properties

New construction on new properties would not directly convert mapped important farmland to school use. Four of the five locations of Prime Farmland are unavailable for development as a school: one is in a flood control basin (Sepulveda Dam Recreation Area); one is on a college campus (Los Angeles Pierce College); one is on an airport property and within the airport influence area for Van Nuys Airport; and the fourth, Orcutt Ranch Horticultural Center, in a Los Angeles city park. The fifth, Forneris Farms, is unsuitable for use as a school because an overhead electric transmission line passes over the east part of that site. Unique Farmland in the District is unsuitable for school use because most of it is both under electric transmission lines and in narrow strips, with length-to-width ratios impracticable for school use.

Therefore, any potential impact contributing to conversion of mapped important farmland to nonagricultural use would be an indirect impact of new or expanded schools being located near mapped farmland. All of the areas of mapped farmland described above are surrounded by intensively developed urbanized land uses. Existing agricultural operations in the District are already surrounded by land uses—residential, park, and school uses—that are sensitive to impacts from agricultural operations, such as pesticide use, dust, and noise. Development of any new or expanded school would require demolition and redevelopment of existing land uses. Considering the existing surroundings of important mapped farmland in the District, it is unlikely that development of a new or expanded school near such farmland would create new incompatibilities between agricultural use and future school use so severe as to force conversion of mapped farmland to nonagricultural uses. Conversion of farmland impacts would be less than significant.

New Construction and Modernization on Existing Campus

No farmland of statewide importance was identified within the District. Although there are areas designated prime farmland and unique farmland as mapped by the FMMP, these areas are not within existing LAUSD school campuses. Where existing schools are near mapped important farmland—for instance, three charter high schools, Birmingham Community Charter High School, High Tech Los Angeles, and Magnolia Science Academy 2 are about 300 feet north of Prime Farmland in the Sepulveda Dam Recreation Area—the analysis
of indirect impacts to mapped farmland above would apply to projects on existing schools. Conversion of farmland impacts would be less than significant.

**Impact 5.2-2:** The SUP would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or with land covered by an existing Williamson Act contract. [Threshold AG-2]

### ZONING FOR AGRICULTURAL USE

#### New Construction on New Properties

Some new construction projects could be proposed for sites that are zoned agricultural but not in production. California school districts can exempt sites for schools including classrooms from local land use regulations pursuant to California Government Code Section 53094(b). Hazards from previously farmed land are discussed in Chapter 5.8 Hazards and Hazardous Materials. New or expanded school uses on new properties would not conflict with any existing agricultural zoning. Impacts would be less than significant.

#### New Construction and Modernization on Existing Campus

As all campuses where these types of projects would occur are existing uses, potential conflicts between zoning for those school sites and the existing school uses are not considered an adverse environmental impact.

As part of the SUP, the District plans to exempt all existing schools from local jurisdiction zoning regulations. Although most school property is owned by the District, the underlying city or county zoning can be residential, industrial, commercial, or agricultural. The California legislature granted school districts the power to exempt school property from county and city zoning requirements, provided the school district complies with the terms of Government Code Section 53094. As lead agency, the District will comply with the criteria for implementation of the land use overrides to render the county and city zoning ordinance inapplicable to the properties. All existing schools not already exempt from local zoning would become exempt as part of the SUP.

### WILLIAMSON ACT CONTRACTS

#### All SUP Projects

A school district is permitted to acquire Williamson Act land if requirements for public acquisition of the

---

24 Government Code Section 53094.

(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this article, this article does not require a school district to comply with the zoning ordinances of a county or city unless the zoning ordinance makes provision for the location of public schools and unless the city or county has adopted a general plan.

(b) Notwithstanding subdivision (a), the governing board of a school district, that has complied with the requirements of Section 65352.2 of this code and Section 21151.2 of the Public Resources Code, by a vote of two-thirds of its members, may render a city or county zoning ordinance inapplicable to a proposed use of property by the school district. The governing board of the school district may not take this action when the proposed use of the property by the school district is for nonclassroom facilities, including, but not limited to, warehouses, administrative buildings, and automotive storage and repair buildings.

(c) The governing board of the school district shall, within 10 days, notify the city or county concerned of any action taken pursuant to subdivision (b).
5. Environmental Analysis
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

land are met and the contract is terminated. A “farmland security zone” contract is a different more restrictive type of Williamson Act contract. School districts are prohibited from taking farmland security zone lands for school facilities. No Williamson Act or farmland security zone contracts are in effect for land within the District. Therefore, any project constructed under the SUP would not conflict with farmland preservation under a Williamson Act contract. No impact would occur.

| Impact 5.2-3 | The SUP would not conflict with zoning for forest land or timberland. [Thresholds AG-3] |

New Construction on New Properties

Nearly all District schools are in urbanized neighborhoods. Thus, it is unlikely that expansions of existing schools would convert forest land to school use. Forest land and timberland would not provide ideal locations for neighborhood schools. Therefore, the District would not propose to acquire those lands. No forest land and timberland impact would occur.

New Construction and Modernization on Existing Campus

Existing District schools do not support forest land or timberland uses, and no impact would occur.

| Impact 5.2-4 | The SUP would not result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use. [Thresholds AG-4]. |

New Construction on New Properties

It is very unlikely that the District would choose to develop a school on forest land. Montane hardwood vegetation in the District is in the northeast corner of the District in the San Gabriel Mountains, several miles from the nearest residential neighborhoods generating demand for schools. No impact would occur.

New Construction and Modernization on Existing Campus

There are no existing District schools in parts of the District where forest land occurs. These projects would occur on existing schools and would not impact forest land. No impact would occur.

---

25 Department of Conservation (Government Code §51291(b)), http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrrp/lca/basic_contract_provisions/Pages/public_acquisitions.aspx
5. Environmental Analysis
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

| Impact 5.2-5: SUP implementation would not involve other changes in the existing environment which could result in conversion of Farmland to nonagricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use. [Threshold AG-5] |

**LAND USE COMPATIBILITY**

**All SUP Projects**

Indirect impacts to mapped important farmland arising from land use incompatibilities would be less than significant, as substantiated above under Impact 5.2-1.

**WATER USE**

Increasing water demands in a region can reduce the practicality and/or economic feasibility of commercial agriculture.

**New Construction on New Properties or Existing Campus**

New construction projects could increase water demands through site-specific net increases in student capacity and other changes, such as developing additional landscaped areas or acquisition of school-adjacent parcels and new classroom construction. Implementation of the SUP would not increase District-wide enrollment. The SUP would accommodate forecast increases in enrollment due to projected increasing numbers of school-aged children as well as higher graduation rates; forecast trends in District enrollment are discussed in Chapter 4, Program Description. SUP implementation therefore would not increase total water consumption within the District beyond existing regional forecasts. Impacts would be less than significant.

**Modernization, Repair, Replacement, Upgrade, Remodel, Renovation and Installation**

Operation of most types of improvements and repairs would not use water. The project would add new food service facilities to some campuses and improve existing food service facilities on some other campuses. As with new construction projects, the SUP would not expand District enrollment and therefore would not increase water use in the region. Impacts would be less than significant.

### 5.2.4 Applicable Regulations and Standard Conditions

- None.

### 5.2.5 Level of Significance Before Mitigation

The following impacts would be less than significant: 5.2-1, 5.2-2, 5.2-3, 5.2-4 and 5.2-5.

### 5.2.6 Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.
5. Environmental Analysis
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

5.2.7 Level of Significance After Mitigation

Impacts would be less than significant.