

3.3 Agricultural Resources

3.3.1 Existing Conditions

The California Department of Conservation's (DOC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) categorizes and maps farmlands within Santa Barbara County biennially; the most recent data available are from calendar year 2004 and are shown in Table 3.3-1.

TABLE 3.3-1
Santa Barbara County FMMP Land Classifications

Category	Acres
Urban and Built-Up Land	62,021
Grazing Land	583,234
Farmland of Local Importance	20,834
Prime Farmland	67,766
Farmland of Statewide Importance	12,378
Unique Farmland	35,131
Water	4,264
Other Land	254,056
Area not mapped	593,691
Total	1,633,374

Source: DOC, 2004a

Definitions of the land classifications used by the FMMP are provided in Table 3.3-2.

TABLE 3.3-2
Definitions of FMMP Categories

Farmland Category	Definition
Prime Farmland	Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of crops. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to current farming methods. Prime Farmland must have been used for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date.
Farmland of Statewide Importance	This land is similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to hold and store moisture. Farmland of Statewide Importance must have been used for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date.

TABLE 3.3-2
Definitions of FMMP Categories

Farmland Category	Definition
Unique Farmland	This is land of lesser quality soils used for the production of specific high economic value crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to current farming methods. Unique farmland is usually irrigated, but may include nonirrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Examples of crops on Unique Farmland include oranges, olives, avocados, rice, grapes, and cut flowers. This category does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.
Farmland of Local Importance	This is land of importance to the local agricultural economy and is determined by each county's Board of Supervisors and local advisory committees. Examples of this type of land could include dairies, dryland farming, aquaculture, and uncultivated areas with soils qualifying for Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance.
Interim Farmland (Irrigated and Non-Irrigated Farmland)	Interim Farmland is a designation used for farmed areas lacking modern soil survey information and for which there is expressed local concern on the status of farmland. Interim Farmland is designated as either Irrigated or Non-Irrigated Farmland. Irrigated Farmlands are lands with a developed irrigation water supply that is dependable and of adequate quality and that have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date. Non-Irrigated Farmlands are lands on which agricultural commodities are produced on a continuing or cyclical basis utilizing stored soil moisture.
Grazing Land	Grazing land is land on which the existing vegetation, whether grown naturally or through management, is suitable for grazing or browsing of livestock.
Urban and Built-up Land	This is used for residential, industrial, commercial, construction, institutional, and public administrative purposes; railroad yards; cemeteries; airports; golf courses; sanitary landfills; sewage treatment plants; water control structures; and other development purposes.
Other Land	Other land is that which is not included in any of the other mapping categories. The following types of land are generally included low-density rural development; brush, timber, and other lands not suitable for livestock grazing; government lands not available for agricultural use; roads systems for freeway interchanges; vacant and nonagricultural land larger than 40 acres in size and surrounded on all sides by urban development; confined livestock facilities of 10 or more acres; strip mines and borrow and gravel pits; a variety of other rural land uses.
Water	Water areas with an extent of at least 40 acres.

Notes:

None of these categories include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.

CEQA defines Important Farmland as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland.

Source: DOC, 2004a.

3.3.1.1 Lompoc Wind Energy Facility

The Lompoc Wind Energy Facility (LWEF) site is located in a rural area and is surrounded by lands used for cattle grazing. The site itself also is used primarily for cattle grazing, although a limited amount of dryland farming occurs immediately on either side of San Miguelito Road between the Scolari and North properties. Most of the LWEF site (approximately 2,926 acres) is designated as Grazing Land by the FMMP, although the approximately 45-acre area where dryland farming occurs is designated as Farmland of

Local Importance (DOC, 2004a). Single family residences or mobile homes and agricultural accessory structures are located on seven of the 10 parcels comprising the LWEF site, and the entire site is zoned for agriculture. The portions of the site where development would occur are zoned Agriculture, 100 or more acre minimum parcel size (AG-II-100). All of the parcels are under Williamson Act Agricultural Preserve contracts (DOC, 2004b). (Refer to Section 3.3.3.2.1 for a discussion of the Williamson Act.)

3.3.1.2 Lompoc Wind Energy Power Line

The 115-kilovolt power line corridor is located in a rural area just south of the City of Lompoc. Most of the corridor is classified as Grazing Land under the FMMP and used for cattle grazing, although small areas of Farmland of Local Importance, Urban and Built-Up Land, and Other Land also are present (Table 3.3-3 and Figure 3.3-1). Within unincorporated Santa Barbara County, the corridor is zoned AG-II-100 and General Agriculture, minimum parcel size 100 acres. Within the City of Lompoc, the corridor is located on land zoned as Open Space and Residential Agriculture. Approximately one-half of the corridor (~~189 acres~~) is under Williamson Act Agricultural Preserve Contracts, of which approximately 22 acres are under nonrenewable contracts (DOC, 2004b).

TABLE 3.3-3
LWEF Power Line Agricultural Land Acreages

FMMP Category	Power Line LWEF (acres)
Urban and Built-up Land	3.99 <u>11.83</u>
Grazing Land	362.84 <u>385.71</u>
Farmland of Local Importance	44.79 <u>7.89</u>
Other Land	8.68 <u>18.45</u>
TOTAL	387.3 <u>423.88</u>

3.3.2 Regulatory Framework

3.3.2.1 State

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly referred to as the Williamson Act, established the state's primary program for the retention of private land in agriculture and open space use. The Williamson Act is a voluntary, locally administered program that offers reduced property taxes on lands that have enforceable restrictions on their use via contracts between individual land owners and local governments. The minimum term for a contract is 10 years. However, some jurisdictions exercise the option of making the term longer, up to 20 years. Contracts renew automatically every year unless the nonrenewal process is initiated by either the local government or the landowner. A "notice of nonrenewal" starts the 9-year nonrenewal period during which the annual tax assessment gradually increases. At the end of the 9-year nonrenewal period, the contract is terminated.

As noted above, the land within the LWEF site and a portion of the proposed power line corridor are located within agricultural preserves; such preserves define the boundary of an

area within which a city or county may enter into contracts with landowners. The boundary is designated by resolution of the Board of Supervisors (Board) or City Council (Council) having jurisdiction. Only land located within an agricultural preserve is eligible for a Williamson Act contract. Preserves are regulated by rules and restrictions designated in the resolution to ensure that the land within the preserve is maintained for agricultural or open space use.

The Williamson Act states that a Board or Council, by resolution, shall adopt rules governing the administration of agricultural preserves. The rules of each agricultural preserve specify the uses allowed. Generally, any commercial agricultural use would be permitted within any agricultural preserve. In addition, local governments may identify compatible uses permitted with a use permit.

3.3.2.2 Local

The County of Santa Barbara is responsible for regulating land uses in its jurisdiction in part through establishing zoning districts that specify allowable uses. As discussed above, the LWEF site is located in an agricultural zone. The County's Land Use & Development Code (Sec. 35.57.030) specifically allows for large wind energy projects on agricultural land, subject to a Conditional Use Permit (CUP).

The County of Santa Barbara has adopted an agricultural preserve program as described above under the Williamson Act. This program is codified under the County's Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones. The County's Agricultural Preserve Advisory Committee reviewed the proposed Project on June 2, 2006, and determined that it is a compatible use under the existing Agricultural Preserve contracts.

The Agricultural Element of the Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan contains a number of policies applicable to agricultural resources. The Project's consistency with those policies is addressed in detail in Section 3.10, Land Use.

3.3.3 Project Impacts, Mitigation, and Residual Impacts

3.3.3.1 Impact Assessment Methodology

Based on the County of Santa Barbara's Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual, the analysis considers whether the Project would result in the conversion of prime agricultural land to nonagricultural use, impairment of agricultural land productivity (whether prime or nonprime), or conflict with agricultural preserve programs.

3.3.3.2 Thresholds of Significance

CEQA Guidelines provide the following thresholds for determining the significance of impacts to agriculture, if the project would:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the FMMP of the California Resources Agency, to nonagricultural use?
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?

- Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to nonagricultural use?

3.3.3.3 Project Impacts, Mitigation, and Residual Impacts

Project Impacts

Impact No.	Impact Description	Phase	Impact Classification
AG-1	Development of the LWEF and power line installation would result in the temporary and permanent disturbance of farmland and provide financial support to property owners.	Construction and Operations	Class III; Class IV

Impact AG-1: Important Farmland/Williamson Act Contract Lands. Development of the LWEF would result in the temporary disturbance of approximately ~~196~~ 36 acres of Grazing Land, and a permanent disturbance of approximately ~~40~~ 32 acres of Grazing Land. Approximately 0.01 acre of the area designated as Farmland of Local Importance would not be temporarily disturbed by Project construction. nor would any No Prime or Unique Farmland would be disturbed. As noted above, the County's Agricultural Preserve Advisory Committee reviewed the Project on June 2, 2006, and determined that it is a compatible use under the existing Agricultural Preserve contracts. As discussed in Section 3.10.3.3, Impact LU-1, wind energy facilities are a permitted use in AG-II-100 zoning districts with a CUP. Grazing would be able to continue during and after construction, and the permanent loss of up to approximately ~~40~~ 32 acres of Grazing Land out of a total of 2,926 acres onsite (~~less than 0.1~~ approximately 0.14 percent of the total acreage) would not significantly impair agricultural productivity. The loss of grazing land would be an adverse, but less than significant impact to agricultural resources (*Class III*).

The Project also could have a beneficial (*Class IV*) impact to agricultural resources because it would provide financial support to property owners, who could use that funding to enhance the viability of their agricultural operations. The Project also would maintain roads in agricultural areas, which would allow property owners greater access to their lands and increase accessibility by firefighters as needed; this increased access also could enhance agricultural operations.

The installation of about ~~169~~ 184 poles in the power line corridor would result in the temporary disturbance of approximately ~~40~~ 33 acres and a permanent disturbance of approximately 1.33 acres. Most of the land that could be affected is Grazing Land, but depending on the placement of individual poles, some Farmland of Local Importance could be affected, as well. Power line construction would not affect Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. Some of the area that would be disturbed is under Williamson Act contracts. As noted above, the County's Agricultural Preserve Advisory Committee reviewed the Project on June 2, 2006, and determined that it is a compatible use under the existing Agricultural Preserve contracts. As discussed in Section 3.10.3.3, Impact LU-1, wind energy facilities are a permitted use in AG-II-100 zoning districts with a CUP. Grazing would be able to continue during and after construction, and the permanent loss of approximately 1.33 acres of Grazing Land or Farmland of Local Importance would not significantly impair agricultural productivity. Impacts to agricultural

resources from construction of the power line would be adverse, but less than significant (*Class III*).

The Project also would provide financial support to property owners along the power line corridor, who could use that funding to enhance the viability of their agricultural operations; thus, construction of the power line could have a beneficial (*Class IV*) impact to agricultural resources.

3.3.3.4 Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required, because no significant impacts to Agricultural Resources would occur.

3.3.3.5 Residual Impacts

~~No residual impacts would occur because no mitigation measures are required~~ be less than significant.

