

OVERVIEW

Agriculture and Land Stewardship Framework and Strategy Tool Box ¹

Background

Projects that convert agricultural lands for urban uses (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial) can compromise a landscape's ability to support agriculture, as well as other open-space uses. Other projects may promote open-space benefits, such as flood management or wildlife habitat on agricultural land, but may limit or eliminate agricultural use on those lands. For many years, governmental and other organizations have encouraged programs that promote the development of ecosystem services on agricultural land as a way to protect natural resources while keeping the land in agriculturally productive private ownership. More recently, attention has been focused on the social and economic impacts of taking agricultural land out of production.

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) has worked with the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Department of Conservation, and others to develop an Agriculture and Land Stewardship (ALS) planning approach that includes a tool box of ALS Strategies and a Framework for considering them that can help inform agricultural and land stewardship activities at all levels of planning and assist with funding decisions. The ALS Framework and Strategies can provide project proponents and those affected by a proposed project with an integrated and collaborative approach to address protecting and changing uses of agricultural land, from valuing its multiple benefits to mitigating its loss. The ALS Framework proposes that projects that plan to convert agricultural land to other uses develop an ALS Plan that considers the different ALS Strategies in the Tool Box. The Framework explains how the different ALS Strategies can be applied in developing such a plan.

Numerous ALS Strategies have been developed based on input from local landowners and other local interests on what they would like to see considered by project proponents for projects that will affect agricultural land. Not all of the ALS Strategies will apply to a specific project. In fact, some of the ALS Strategies may provide different approaches that are not compatible. DWR does not recommend any particular strategy² and anticipates periodic updates to the Framework and ALS Strategy Tool Box.

Some of the ALS Strategies can be used by project proponents to work with local government and landowners to avoid or minimize impacts on agriculture and to consider local and regional plans. Some of the ALS Strategies provide options to consider environmental mitigation required under the California Environmental Quality Act. Other ALS Strategies can assist in maintaining the agricultural viability and sustainability of the area where the project is located. Finally, some of the ALS Strategies discuss opportunities to keep local landowners and farmers on the land by participating in project activities, when a project involves conversion from agriculture to other open space uses.

¹ For documents related to this subject, see <https://agriculturallandstewardship.water.ca.gov/>. Requests to meet to discuss issues raised should be sent to DWRAgriculturalStewardshipInfo@water.ca.gov

² For more on Draft BDCP EIR/EIS (2013) discussion of mitigation of BDCP impacts on agricultural resources, see http://baydeltaconservationplan.com/Libraries/Dynamic_Document_Library/Public_Draft_BDCP_EIR-EIS_Chapter_14_-_Agricultural_Resources.sflb.ashx.

ALS planning is consistent with State and Delta regional policies and plans, including:

- California Agricultural Vision
- California Department of Food and Agriculture's Climate Change Consortium for Specialty Crops
- Draft Governor's Environmental Goals and Policies Report
- California Air Resources Board's Cap and Trade Auction Proceeds Investment Plan
- California Natural Resources Agency Climate Change Adaptation Strategy
- California Water Plan Update 2013
- Delta Stewardship Council's Delta Plan
- Delta Protection Commission's Economic Sustainability Plan
- Delta Conservancy's Strategic Plan.

ALS Framework and Tool Box of Strategies

The ALS Framework and Strategies encourage the exploration of a voluntary process to engage project proponents and other interested parties in pursuing *mutually beneficial solutions* that are based on the following fundamental premises:

- provide the environmental and habitat benefits that are part of the project
- are consistent with state and regional policies
- provide opportunities for farmers to stay on the land
- maintain agricultural and economic viability in the area where the project is located

The ALS Strategies are organized in five categories based on their intended outcome:

- Help maintain agriculture
- Provide incentives for conservation on farmland
- Manage land to reverse subsidence and sequester carbon
- Support an agricultural economy
- Successful planning by project proponents

The discussion of each ALS Strategy covers its topics in the following order:

- Description of the strategy
- Related policies and programs
- Issues
- Opportunities and potential partners

The ALS Framework and Strategies can be accessed and downloaded from the ALS website at <https://AgriculturalLandStewardship.water.ca.gov>.

Reviewers can complete a Feedback Form online, and their comments will be considered in subsequent versions of the strategies and treated as public records. Meeting requests to discuss issues raised by this Overview or the ALS Strategies should be sent to DWRAGriculturalStewardshipInfo@water.ca.gov.

List of ALS Strategies

A. Strategies to help maintain agriculture

1. Improve flood management
 - 1.1. Improve flood protection for agriculture
 - 1.2. Help landowners comply with FEMA flood insurance regulations
 - 1.3. Help with local flood preparedness and response efforts
2. Improve on-farm agricultural productivity, including soil and water quality
3. Control weeds and other pests
 - 3.1. Reinvigorate County Weed Management Areas
 - 3.2. Prioritize weeds and other pests for area-wide control
 - 3.3. Encourage use of weed-free construction materials
4. Reduce conflict between agriculture and nearby habitat lands
 - 4.1. Establish good neighbor policies
 - 4.2. Provide “take” coverage for neighboring lands
 - 4.3. Support local efforts to reduce nuisance and illegal activities
5. Provide agricultural conservation easements

B. Strategies that provide incentives for conservation on agricultural land

1. Partner with others to maintain and enhance environmental quality on agricultural land
2. Provide incentives for landowners to take part in market-based conservation programs

C. Strategies to manage land to reverse subsidence and sequester carbon

1. Provide incentives to stabilize or reverse land subsidence
2. Assist landowners to produce and sell greenhouse gas offset credits
3. Investigate options to designate subsidence reduction and carbon sequestration crops as agricultural production for regulatory and incentive purposes

D. Strategies that support an agricultural economy

1. Develop area-wide economic and land use studies
 - 1.1. Develop an historic and current land use study
 - 1.2. Develop an economic study of agricultural activity and related infrastructure
 - 1.3. Develop a plan for protection and restoration of habitat areas that takes into consideration the vitality of the agricultural economy (under development)
2. Promote economic development
3. Improve transportation infrastructure
4. Help landowners earn new revenue from recreation and tourism
5. Assist landowners in working with governmental agencies
 - 5.1. Public advisor for government projects
 - 5.2. Farmbudsman – Help landowners navigate regulatory requirements for agricultural activities
 - 5.3. Work with others to better align regulatory processes to expedite wildlife friendly agriculture

E. Strategies for successful planning by project proponents

1. Project planning
 - 1.1. Early project planning
 - 1.2. Work with landowners
 - 1.2.1. Involve landowners in project planning
 - 1.2.2. Compensate landowners to manage agricultural land for project purposes
 - 1.2.3. Compensate landowners to manage project habitat lands
 - 1.3. Avoid, minimize and mitigate for impacts to agricultural land from project
 - 1.3.1. Reduce impacts on land
 - 1.3.2. Reduce impacts on ground water levels
 - 1.3.3. Mitigate for conversion of agricultural land
 - 1.4. Implementation and funding
2. Work with local government
 - 2.1. Coordinate with local planning efforts
 - 2.2. Implement actions required by the Williamson Act
 - 2.3. Work with counties to expand Williamson Act authorized uses
 - 2.4. Investigate options for in lieu tax revenue for local government
 - 2.5. Work with others to explore the value of reinstating state funding of Williamson Act subventions