

4.8 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This section evaluates the environmental impacts of the project on agricultural resources. A description of the existing site characteristics and setting is followed by an analysis focused on the relationship between the project and existing plans and policies, and the project's compatibility with existing on-site and adjacent land uses. Mitigation is recommended to reduce project impacts where feasible.

4.8.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

City of Manteca (City) general plan policies are intended to represent the City's long-term vision for the area. As described in the City general plan, most of the remaining agricultural land within city limits is expected to be converted to urban uses over time. The project site is in agricultural production or is associated with agricultural uses. The City envisions that the project site and surrounding land areas would be developed with commercial and residential land uses. Regardless, the following describes the agricultural setting of the site and the relevant programs that classify, designate, and conserve agricultural resources within California.

Soil Capability Classification

The Soil Capability Classification System takes into consideration soil limitations, the risk of damage when the soils are used, and the way in which soils respond to treatment. Soil capability classes range from Class I soils, which have few limitations for agriculture, to Class VIII soils, which are unsuitable for agriculture. Generally, as the ratings of the capability classification system increase, yields and profits are more difficult to obtain.

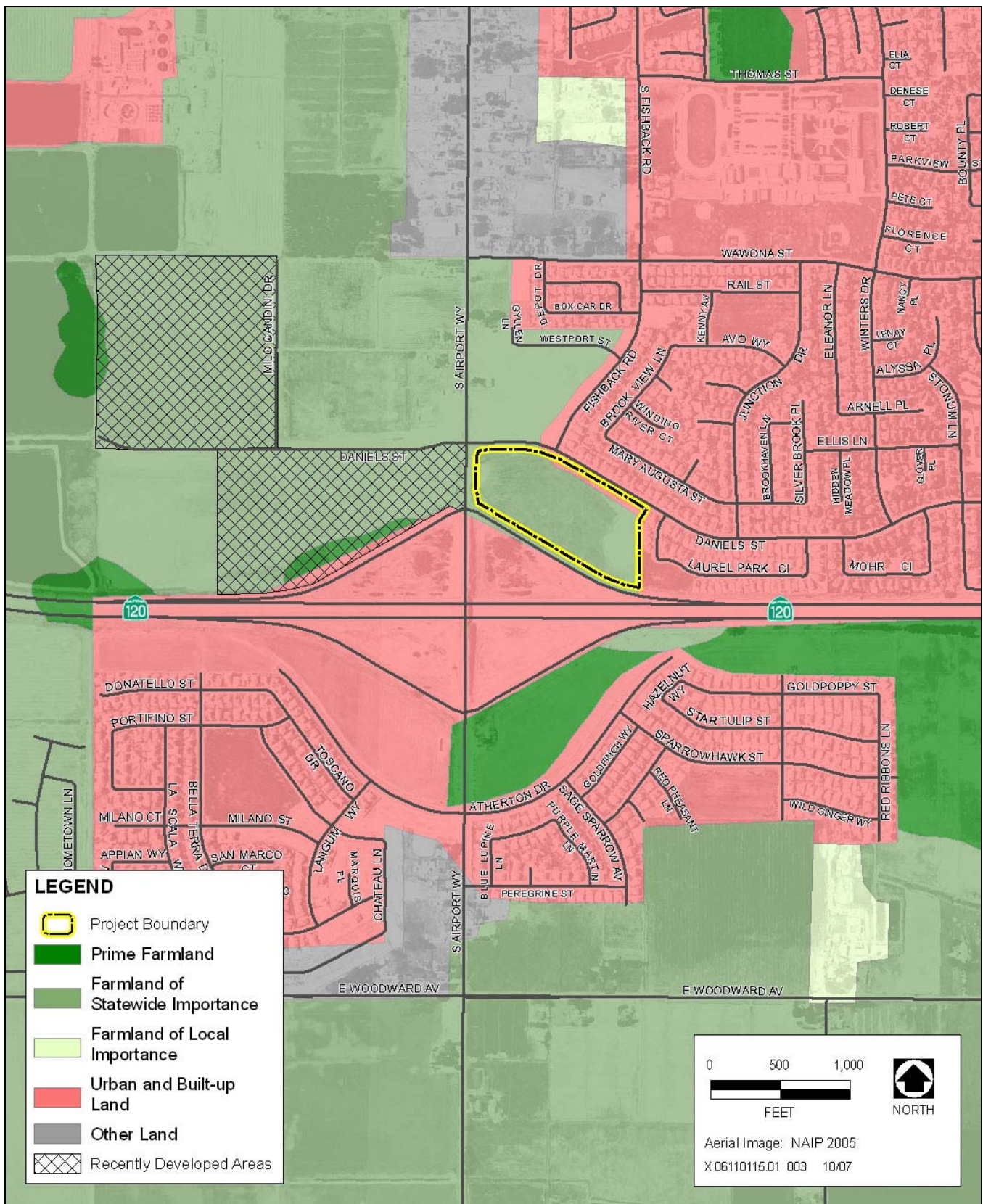
Soils in the project area consist of Delhi loamy sand and Tinnin loamy coarse sand. Delhi loamy sand has a Class III-IV capability classification, which indicates that on-site soils are suitable for production but have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require conservation practices, or both. Class III-IV soils are especially good for vineyard and walnut production. Tinnin loamy coarse sand has a Class III capability classification.

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) was established in 1982 to continue the Important Farmland mapping efforts begun in 1975 by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS). The intent of the SCS (renamed the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS] in 1998) was to produce agricultural resource maps based on soil quality and land use across the nation. The California Department of Conservation (CDC) sponsors the FMMP and is also responsible for establishing agricultural easements in accordance with Public Resources Code Sections 10250–10255 (FMMP 2001).

As part of the nationwide agricultural land use mapping effort, the SCS/NRCS developed a series of definitions known as Land Inventory and Monitoring (LIM) criteria. The LIM criteria classified the land's suitability for agricultural production. Suitability included both the physical and chemical characteristics of soils as well as the actual land use. Important Farmland maps are derived from the SCS/NRCS soil survey maps using the LIM criteria and are available by county. Important Farmland maps classify land into one of the following eight categories: Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, Grazing Land, Urban and Built-Up Land, Other Land, and Water.

The Important Farmland map for San Joaquin County designates the entire project site as Farmland of Statewide Importance (Exhibit 4.8-1). Farmland of Statewide Importance is described as "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 before the mapping date" (FMMP 2004).



Source: City of Manteca 2007, FMMP 2005

Important Farmland

Exhibit 4.8-1

Table 4.8-1 below shows the amount of farmland in San Joaquin County over a recent 12-year period.

Table 4.8-1 Acreages of Important Farmland in San Joaquin County						
Land Use Category	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2004
Prime Farmland	436,146	434,476	433,134	429,168	419,227	412,550
Farmland of Statewide Importance	99,566	99,148	98,148	96,795	93,739	91,222
Unique Farmland	47,086	47,206	48,759	52,715	59,118	62,535
Farmland of Local Importance	53,031	54,267	53,479	53,682	58,906	57,808
Total	635,829	635,097	633,535	632,360	626,402	624,115
Sources: FMMP 2007						

As shown in Table 4.8-1, the total amount of Important Farmland within San Joaquin County decreased by approximately 11,714 acres, or 2%, between 1992 and 2004. Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance has decreased by 23,596 acres and 8,344 acres, respectively. Designation of new areas as Unique Farmland and Farmland of Local Importance has resulted in net increases for these categories between 1992 and 2004.

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, also known as the Williamson Act, is designed to preserve agriculture and open space lands by discouraging their premature and unnecessary conversion to urban uses. The act enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use. In return, landowners receive property tax assessments which are much lower than normal because they are based on farming and open space uses as opposed to full market value. None of the project site is currently under a Williamson Act contract (City of Manteca 2003).

4.8.2 REGULATORY SETTING

A summary of policies and goals related to agricultural land uses are provided below.

FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws are applicable to the proposed project.

STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The CDC FMMP is described above under “Environmental Setting.” The approximately 16-acre project site is designated Farmland of Statewide Importance.

Williamson Act

The Williamson Act is described above under Environmental Setting. The project site is not under Williamson Act contract.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

City of Manteca Right to Farm Ordinance

Chapter 8.24 of Manteca Municipal Code is a “Right to Farm” Ordinance intended to protect agricultural productivity in the city. The Ordinance states:

It is the policy of this City to preserve, protect and encourage the use of viable agricultural land for the production of food and other agricultural products. When nonagricultural land uses extend into or approach agricultural areas, conflicts often arise between such land uses and agricultural operations. Such conflicts often result in the involuntary curtailment or cessation of agricultural operations, and discourage investment in such operations. This chapter is intended to reduce the occurrence of conflicts between nonagricultural and agricultural land uses within the City.

City of Manteca General Plan

The City general plan includes the following policies and implementation programs related to agricultural resources that are relevant to this analysis:

- ▶ **Policy RC-P-19:** The City shall support the continuation of agricultural uses on lands designated for urban use, until urban development is imminent.
- ▶ **Policy RC-P-21:** In approving urban development near existing agricultural lands, the City shall take actions so that such development will not unnecessarily constrain agricultural practices or adversely affect the viability of nearby agricultural operations.
- ▶ **Policy RC-P-25:** The City shall ensure, in approving urban development near existing agricultural lands, that such development will not unnecessarily constrain agricultural practices or adversely affect the economic viability of nearby agricultural operations.
- ▶ **Policy RC-P-30:** The City of Manteca will participate in a county-wide program to mitigate the conversion of Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance to urban uses.

City of Manteca Agricultural Mitigation Fee Program

In June 2005, the Manteca City Council adopted Ordinance No. 1304, adding Chapter 13.42 to the Manteca Municipal Code, which established the agricultural mitigation fee program. This was done in conjunction with the settlement of the lawsuit regarding the South County Surface Water Project, in which the Cities of Lathrop, Manteca, and Tracy agreed to implement the program to mitigate for the loss of Important Farmland due to the conversion to private urban uses. Under the program, the fees collected are used to acquire farmland conservation easements or farmland deed restrictions. The current fee is \$2,000 per acre and is adjusted each year.

4.8.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The focus of this analysis is on impacts to agricultural resources resulting from project implementation. Evaluation of potential agricultural impacts of the project was based on a review of the planning documents pertaining to the project area, including the City general plan and associated EIR, the California Department of Conservation Important Farmland Map for San Joaquin County, the California Department of Conservation Farmland Conversion Reports, the San Joaquin County Multi-species Habitat Conservation and Open Space Plan, consultation with appropriate agencies, and field review of the project site and surroundings.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The project would result in significant agricultural impacts if it 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 non-agricultural use;
- ▶ involve other changes in the existing environment which, because of their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use; or
- ▶ result in conflicts with surrounding agricultural operations.

No lands on the project site are subject to a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, this issue is not discussed further in this analysis.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

IMPACT 4.8-1 **Agricultural Resources — Direct Conversion of 16 Acres of Important Farmland to Nonagricultural Urban Use.** *Implementation of the project would result in the direct conversion of approximately 16 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural urban use. Conversion of Important Farmland would be a **significant** impact.*

The 16-acre project site is fallow agricultural land. The Important Farmland map for San Joaquin County designates the project site as Farmland of Statewide Importance. Implementation of the project would result in the direct conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural urban use. The total amount of agricultural land that would be converted to urban use by the project (16 acres) represents approximately 0.003% of the important farmland in San Joaquin County (FMMP 2004).

The City general plan designates the entire site for Commercial/Mixed Use (CMU). This designation indicates that the City has planned for conversion of this agricultural land to urban uses, and that the general plan does not envision nor designate this area for permanent agricultural uses. The EIR for the City general plan found that conversion of prime agricultural land, including the project site, to urban uses to be a significant and unavoidable impact with no feasible mitigation. The Land Use Element and Resource Conservation Element of the general plan includes policies aimed at protecting or conserving important farmland within the city by promoting and encouraging the continuation of agricultural uses and discouraging the premature conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. The general plan also includes a policy stating that the “City shall support the continuation of agricultural uses on land designated for urban use until development is imminent” (policy RC-P-19). While the project is consistent with this policy, it would result in the direct conversion of agricultural land to urban uses, permanently removing the land from agricultural production.

As part of adopting the general plan, the City Council adopted Findings of Fact and a Statement of Overriding Consideration that indicated urban development was of greater benefit to the community than preserving agricultural land within city limits. Although conversion of the project site to urban uses would be consistent with the general plan, farmlands are an important resource to the region and direct conversion of Important Farmland to urban land uses would be considered a **significant** impact.

IMPACT 4.8-2 **Agricultural Resources — Conflict with Surrounding Agricultural Operations.** *The proposed project is adjacent to a fallow parcel to the north. While agricultural operations adjacent to urban development typically results in potential land use conflicts (e.g., increased dust generation, noise from farming equipment, odors from fertilizer applications), these potential adverse interfaces are not expected to occur adjacent to the Lowe's property because urban development is approved or already exists adjacent to the site and there are no plans for active agricultural operations to be implemented prior to development of undeveloped lands. The project would result in **less-than-significant** conflicts with surrounding agricultural operations.*

The project area currently includes vacant land (e.g., a fallow field) to the north of the project site, and nearby residential subdivisions. Implementation of the project would contribute to the alteration of the natural or cultivated setting in the project area to developed urban uses. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the placement of urban land uses adjacent to land that could support agricultural operations. However, the City general plan designation for the 11-acre parcel to the north of the project site is Neighborhood Commercial, the zoning designation for the parcel is commercial, and a shopping center has been approved by the City and is proceeding through the building entitlement process. It is expected that this site would be developed with urban land uses in the next 1-2 years. Further, this site is not currently under active agricultural production (e.g., farming) and the owners of the property do not intend to implement agricultural activities at this site prior to development.

While agricultural-urban interfaces can result in the potential for conflicts between agricultural activities and adjacent urban land uses, these potential adverse interfaces are not expected to occur adjacent to the Lowe's property because urban development is approved or already exists adjacent to the site and there are no plans for active agricultural operations to be implemented prior to development of undeveloped lands. In general, potential long-term conflicts between the proposed project and adjacent open space lands that could support agricultural operations to the north of the project site are expected to be minimal. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would be consistent with City general plan policies RC-P-21 and RC-P-25. Furthermore, because conflicts between the proposed project and adjacent operations are expected to be minimal, development of the project site would be consistent with City general plan policy RC-P-19. The project would result in **less-than-significant** conflicts with surrounding agricultural operations.

4.8.4 MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation measures are required for the following less-than-significant impact:

Impact 4.8-2: Conflict with Surrounding Agricultural Operations.

The following mitigation measure is provided for the significant impact.

Mitigation Measure 4.8-1: Direct Conversion of 16 Acres of Important Farmland to Nonagricultural Urban Use. The project applicant shall pay the required City of Manteca agricultural mitigation fee to help offset the conversion of Important Farmland. Consistent with Chapter 13.42 of the Manteca Municipal Code, a \$2,000 agricultural mitigation fee shall be assessed for every acre of Important Farmland that would be developed as part of the proposed project. A total of \$32,000 (\$2,000 multiplied by 16 acres) shall be provided to the City. Under the City's program, the fees collected would be used to acquire farmland conservation easements and/or farmland deed restrictions. Consistent with goals of the City's Right To Farm ordinance, this mitigation measure would help reduce the occurrence of conflicts between nonagricultural and agricultural land uses due to development pressures by preserving agricultural lands located within the project vicinity.

Implementation of this mitigation measure would substantially lessen significant impacts associated with the conversion of 16 acres of Important Farmland on the project site because funding conservation easements would provide assistance to the public and private sectors in protecting other farmland from the pressures of development. The agricultural mitigation fee would be used to specifically purchase farmland easements and/or

farmland deed restrictions to partially offset project impacts; however, 16 acres would still be unavoidably lost. In addition, no new farmland would be made available and the productivity of existing farmland would not be improved as a result of this mitigation measure. Therefore, full compensation for losses of Important Farmland would not be achieved. No other feasible mitigation is available. Impact 4.8-1 (Direct Conversion of 16 Acres of Important Farmland to Nonagricultural Urban Use) would remain **significant and unavoidable** after mitigation.

4.8.5 LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

Implementation of mitigation measure 4.8-1 would mitigate for the conversion of Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural use (policy RC-P-30). Although the above mitigation would substantially reduce the project's agricultural resource impact, implementation of this measure would not eliminate the project's Important Farmland impacts (Impact 4.8-1) to a less-than-significant level. Therefore, this impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.