

3.2 Farmland

3.2.1 Types of Farmland

The study area includes thousands of hectares (acres) of farmland used for orchards and grain crops, raising livestock and poultry, grazing, and dairy operations. Agricultural land throughout western Riverside County is under increasing pressure of conversion to urban use. This analysis focuses on potential impacts to three important types of farmland, hereinafter referred to as “designated” farmland. The summarized definitions below are from the California Department of Conservation, and are different from general agricultural land discussed in Sections 3.1 and 4.1 (Figure 3.2.1):

- C *Prime Farmland* has the best combination of characteristics for producing crops. It produces sustained high yields when properly managed, and is not in or committed to urban development.
- C *Unique Farmland* is other than prime farmland but capable of producing high-value crops.
- C *Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance* does not qualify as Prime or Unique Farmlands, but is irrigated land determined to be important by State and local governments.

3.2.2 Alternatives

3.2.2.1 Alternative 1a

Alternative 1a includes 158 ha (391 ac) of Prime Farmland, 100 ha (247 ac) of Unique Farmland, and 513 ha (1,267 ac) of Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance. Most of the existing designated farmland is along Ramona Expressway east of I-215, an area dominated by grain crops near the interstate and by dairies and related farms closer to San Jacinto. Three large dairy operations are located within this alternative. West of I-215, parcels of farmland tend to be smaller, and small portions of several orchards are located along Sobrante Road.

3.2.2.2 Alternative 1b

The designated farmland characteristics of Alternative 1b are nearly the same as Alternative 1a, with minor differences, because its southerly course avoids a large area of orchards. This alternative includes 148 ha (366 ac) of Prime Farmland, 108 ha (268 ac) of Unique Farmland, and almost 516 ha (1,274 ac) of Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance.

3.2.2.3 Alternative 4a

Alternative 4a includes 80 ha (198 ac) of Prime Farmland, 3 ha (8 ac) of Unique Farmland, and 397 ha (981 ac) of Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance. Most of the designated farmland is along the route shared by all versions of Alternative 4, from

Figure 3.2.1: Designated Farmland

Hemet west along SR-74/Florida Avenue/Pinacate Road/Ethanac Road to the San Jacinto River. Irrigated farmland is located on both sides of the road through this area, and numerous parcels ranging in size from one-half to a full section suggest larger farming operations. West of the San Jacinto River, high-value farmland is less common and dispersed, and tracts generally are much smaller.

3.2.2.4 Alternative 4c

The designated farmland characteristics of 4c are nearly the same as Alternative 4a [identical course until last 3 km (2 mi)]. Alternative 4c includes 80 ha (198 ac) of Prime Farmland, 3 ha (8 ac) of Unique Farmland, and 415 ha (1,025 ac) of Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance.

3.2.2.5 Alternative 4d

Alternative 4d includes slightly less designated farmland, because west of the San Jacinto River it runs primarily through lands not suited for agriculture. East of the river, designated farmland is described in Alternative 4a. Alternative 4d includes 80 ha (198 ac) of Prime Farmland, 3 ha (8 ac) of Unique Farmland, and 364 ha (899 ac) of Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance.

3.2.2.6 Alternative 5a

Alternative 5a includes 45 ha (111 ac) of Prime Farmland, 11 ha (27 ac) of Unique Farmland, and 361 ha (890 ac) of Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance. Most of the farmland along the east half of the route is shared by all versions of Alternative 5, from SR-79/Domenigoni Parkway west/northwest along Matthews Road to Romoland, then west along Ethanac Road to the San Jacinto River. Irrigated farmland is located throughout this area, and numerous large parcels ranging upward from one-half section of land evidence larger farming operations. The Prime Farmland is located along Matthews Road between Leon and Menifee Roads. West of the San Jacinto River high-value farmland is less common and dispersed, and tracts generally are much smaller.

3.2.2.7 Alternative 5b

Alternative 5b includes 3 ha (7 ac) less designated farmland than Alternative 5a, because west of the San Jacinto River its more northerly route runs primarily through grazing or vacant lands that are not irrigated. East of the river, designated farmland is described in 5a. Alternative 5b includes 45 ha (111 ac) of Prime Farmland, 11 ha (27 ac) of Unique Farmland, and 358 ha (883 ac) of Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance.

3.2.2.8 Alternative 5c

The designated farmland in Alternative 5c is primarily east of the San Jacinto River, as described in Alternative 5a. This route includes 45 ha (111 ac) of Prime Farmland, 11 ha (27 ac) of Unique Farmland, and 378 ha (934 ac) of Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance.