

Some or all of the project contribution to the cumulative loss of agricultural lands would be reduced through the proposed mitigation measure in Section 4.2 of this EIS/EIR:

4.2.3.4 RCTC will investigate opportunities to replace the Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance lost as a result of right-of-way acquisition, including the use of conservation easements on alternate farmland parcels.

4.16.2.2 Indirect Effects

In addition to the direct loss of land available for farming as a result of development, urban encroachment adversely affects the efficiency of remaining farming operations due to “increased air pollution, livestock predation by pets, crop diseases resulting from inadequate care of off-farm ornamental plants, restrictions on pesticide use and burning, and requirements to set aside on-farm buffer zones.” At the same time, production costs increase due to rising land values, water scarcity, theft and vandalism of farm equipment crop pilferage, road congestion, and personal injury liability resulting from trespassing on farms. By reducing the profitability of remaining farming operations, urban encroachment tends to take on a spiraling effect, encouraging further losses of farms to urban development (Source: General Plan EIR, Section 4.2).

In addition to the direct loss of agricultural land, build out of the proposed General Plan will permit the development of residential and employment generating uses adjacent to agricultural designated land. Indirect impacts associated with the agricultural uses include: the generation of dust, odors, and noise from agricultural operation; the proliferation of flies and other pest species; the potential for groundwater contamination (from large-scale feed lots and dairies), and aerial application of agricultural chemicals (Source: General Plan EIR, Section 4.2). Build out of the proposed General Plan will increase the likelihood of having residential and other community development uses in closer proximity to agricultural uses. However, the implementation of a CETAP alternative in the WT study area will not substantively alter the future land use pattern in western Riverside County as proposed in the General Plan, and therefore will not result in a substantive contribution to the indirect, cumulative impacts to agriculture. WT Alternatives 1,3, 7a and 7b will not include or be adjacent to agricultural uses under General Plan build out conditions; therefore, no indirect impacts to agriculture are expected as a result of these alternatives.

The draft policies within the proposed General Plan help to retain agricultural resources within the County. While the implementation of proposed General Plan policies would help reduce the conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses, the loss of 55,423 ha (136,872 ac) of agriculturally designated land would remain an unavoidable impact. The CETAP contribution to this loss (0 to 67 ha [0 to 165 ac] of agriculture within bandwidths under future, General Plan conditions) may be further reduced through the application of conservation easements as specified in the proposed mitigation measures. In sum, the project’s contribution to cumulative impacts to farmlands would not be substantive in light of the land use changes proposed in the General Plan.