



Lake County 2050 Agricultural Stakeholder Focus Group Summary

In Person Meeting
Thursday, December 19, 2024

Meeting Overview

Lake County hosted an Agriculture Stakeholder Focus Group meeting the evening of Thursday, December 19, from 4:00pm until 6:00pm as part of Lake County 2050, the comprehensive update to Lake County's General Plan. The meeting was conducted in-person in the County Board Chambers.

Attendees

Agencies Represented—Representatives of the following agencies and organizations were in attendance: Lake County Board of Supervisors, General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC), Kelseyville Local Area Plan Advisory Committee (LAPAC), Lake County Farm Bureau, and Lake County Farmers' Finest.

Individual Attendees: Margaux Kambara, GPAC, Kelseyville LAPAC; Bruno Sabatier, Chair, Board of Supervisors, District 2; Brad Rasmussen, Board of Supervisors-Elect, District 4; Cornelia Sieber-Davis, Lake County Farmers' Finest; Rebecca Harber, Lake County Farm Bureau, Shoreline Communities LAPAC; Shannon Sanders, Middletown LAPAC; Summer Brown, Kelseyville LAPAC; Sharron Zoller, GPAC; Will Weiss, Lake County Farm Bureau; Carolyn Hillman; Kate Schmidt-Hopper; Jill Baker; Wes Baker; Doug Herzog; Tom Lajcik; Annette Hopkins; Shan Sihe; Colleen Rentsch; Katherine Vanderwall; Broc Zoller; Randy Djernes; Bill Djernes; Jim Comstock; Erin Cherry; Andrea Adams; Daniel Suenram; Rob S.; Toni Scully; Norman Kimes; Carson Holdenreid; Noah Cornell; Greg Panella; Diane Hendersen; Gabe Strong; Jessica Mihalenko; Katy Evans; A. Scully; Michelle Scully; Justin Behn; Eric Seely.

County Staff: Mireya Turner, Shannon Walker-Smith, Michelle Irace, Mary Claybon, Trish Turner, Max Stockton

County AmeriCorps: Dawn Kennedy, Eric Hernandez, Morgan Alberti

Meeting Introduction

The meeting began with opening remarks from Lake County Community Development Director, Mireya Turner, who thanked participants for coming, emphasizing the importance of community involvement in the Lake County 2050 General Plan, especially on the topic of agricultural resources, an integral part of Lake County's history, identity, and economy. Director Turner provided a brief introduction to Lake County 2050 and outlined the goals for the meeting.

Question and Answer Period

Following the introduction, Director Truner facilitated a question-and-answer session. In addition to the questions asked, the following comments were made during the question and answer period and/or submitted via comment card:

- Comments pertaining to agricultural land preservation:
 - Preserve existing farmland and prevent the rezoning of farmland to other land uses.
 - Preserve the cultivation of food crops such as honey, olives, pears, saffron, and walnuts. Do not let cannabis take over the production of food crops.
- Comments pertaining to water:
 - Conservation of agricultural land and resources needs to consider the distribution of groundwater supplies, some areas have more groundwater resources than others.
 - Add provisions for groundwater basin protection policies for all land uses/categories.
- Comments pertaining to wildfire:
 - Adopt proposed wildfire protection standards (Fire Adapted Communities).
 - Reduce unwanted human-caused wildland fire ignitions in and near communities.
 - Support community wildland fire protection planning." (National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy Phase II National Report, p. 26).
- Comments pertaining to the Zoning Code:
 - Fix incongruities between overlay districts titles and land use/zoning designations underneath them.
 - Define authorities responsible for enforcing regulations for cannabis production in the zoning code.
- Comments pertaining to cannabis:
 - Do not permit cannabis cultivation in protected agricultural zones.
 - Cannabis cultivation should be limited to ranchette size or at a defunct vineyard, out of scenic views.
 - At a Kelseyville Area Plan meeting, residents expressed concerns about commercial cannabis cultivation, particularly where it can be seen along the scenic HWY 20 on the north shore.
- Comments specific to the Lower Lake Community:
 - Lower Lake community does not wish to expand with lower income housing or commercial development, e.g. Dollar General, on Main Street.
 - There is support in the Lower Lake community for expansion of agricultural land.
 - There is support in the Lower Lake community for local job growth.
- Comments pertaining to sustainability:
 - Environmental stewardship should be integral to farming practices. Provide support for sustainable farming programs. Ceago is a good example of sustainable farming in the county.
 - Sustainable farming practices should center circular systems: reuse, recycle, reclaim, and composting farm waste. Also using cover crops like fava beans to enrich soil. Sonoma County is a good example of promoting sustainable farming.
 - Prioritize and promote food crops using examples of successful sustainable farms.
- All utilities provided in the County should be provided locally, providing local jobs. It would be extremely difficult to revert rezoned agricultural land to residential zoning back to agricultural zoning.

- Keep high density residential buildings in areas where adequate services are provided e.g. big stores, medical services, transportation, and water resources.
- Restore former Natural Resource Management Committee.
- Provide a clear list of hazards (e.g., environmental) and benefits (economic, cultural, educational) of agricultural operations in Lake County.
- Invest in agricultural outreach and education. Collaborate with the County Agriculture Department, UC Extension, Farm Bureau, Sierra Club, Audubon Society, Resource Conservation District, Community Development, Watershed Protection District, Department of Public Works, County Counsel, Administration (Public Information Office), etc.
- Add provisions for ongoing discussion (i.e. one year after Plan adoption) that address how the political environment (immigration) may affect farm labor, and potential farm labor shortages.
- Using sprinklers for frost protection is important for grape agriculture. Pursue other methods to increase Clearlake hitch population, like prioritizing enforcement against illegal diversions and illegal cannabis grows.
- The biggest challenges facing agriculture are mostly water, and secondarily pests and run-off. Also, land has already changed from food to wine crops, and now possibly to cannabis, which is a concern.
- Look at what Healdsburg did for a model of providing farmworker housing. Housing should be provided for anyone who works at an agricultural venue or farm and helps retain workers.
- Promote concepts like ‘victory gardens’ that empower communities and individuals to grow their own food.

Group Discussion

Meeting attendees dived into six groups to discuss questions designed to inform the General Plan. Each question is presented below, followed by a bulleted list of participants’ insights.

What climate hazards are of most concern to the agriculture community now and in the future? (Climate hazards include agricultural and forestry pests and diseases, drought, extreme temperatures, human health hazards, flooding, landslides and debris flow, severe weather, and wildfire and smoke.)

- Wildfire and smoke
 - Heat and extreme temperatures impact crops.
 - Tree mortality.
- Drought
 - Access to water resources, particularly groundwater resources.
 - Water demand is higher than available supply.
 - Groundwater regulations regarding frost and irrigation season usages.
- Flooding
 - Particularly in the following areas: Scotts Valley, Mount St. Helena, Putah Creek, and Cache Creek.
 - Debris flow and pollution in creeks.
- Soil erosion
- Crop cover and sustainability

- Agricultural and forestry pests and diseases
 - pine beetles and oak borer beetles.
- Health hazards
 - Smoke from wildfires and cannabis odor contribute to poor respiratory health.
 - Working conditions of farmworkers who work under extreme heat.

Of the climate hazards of concern, which do you feel most and least prepared to address and what can the County do better to support your preparedness?

- Most prepared to address wildfires. There is advanced warning, which helps increase preparedness.
- Least prepared to address
 - Access to water resources and water quality.
 - Limited aquifer development.
 - Invasive species
 - Limitations on using pesticides if education facilities are located close to farms.
 - Soil erosion
 - Wildfire evacuation
 - There is not a streamlined system for evacuation from wildfires.
 - Concerns about the evacuation of livestock.
 - AgPass messaging needs to be expanded to reach more farmworkers.
 - Maintain designated “no hazardous waste” zone on Highway 20 that prevent the accidental spilling of waste from trucks into Clear Lake.
- The County can do the following to support preparedness:
 - Expand AgPass messaging and put Lake Evacuation and Animal Protection (LEAP) framework in place for evacuation from wildfires.
 - Promote water conservation methods for farming.
 - Partner with the Department of Forestry to remove overgrowth of weeds on land and in creeks to protect crops.
 - Plan check for new healthcare, daycare, and other education facilities with an exclusion zone 0.25 miles away from farms.
 - Provide access to a database with hydrology reports for locating better water.
 - Compile a list of resources for recycling used farm equipment, proper disposal of abandoned travel trailers, and other waste solutions.
 - Provide a list of local businesses with weed and garbage abatement that is updated regularly.
 - Partner with Habitat for Humanity to clean up and help seniors with housing updates.
 - Support diversifying farming.
 - Simplify permitting regulations for greenhouses, organics, and hoop houses.
 - Ensure protection of agricultural lands from developments via buffer zones.

Are there people in the agriculture community (agriculture workers, landowners, and other farmers), crops, or practices that are more or most vulnerable to climate change hazards?

- People in the agricultural community who are more vulnerable to climate change hazards:
 - Farmworkers
 - Reduced work hours and wages and worsening working conditions due to severe weather conditions.

- Exposure to smoke from wildfires affect farmworkers' respiratory health the most.
- All stakeholders of industry, including landowners and businesses.
- Crops that are more vulnerable to climate change hazards:
 - Permanent, high water use crops in the county including pears, walnuts, grapes, and similar crops.
 - Livestock.
- Practices that are more vulnerable to climate change hazards:
 - Pruning practices.
 - Irrigation techniques.

Is the existing farmworker housing inventory satisfying the need for housing, and if not, what is missing or needs to change?

- Existing issues with housing:
 - Limited housing availability.
 - Overcrowding and poor living conditions.
 - Lack of applicants to available housing due to fewer migrant workers; the number of migrant workers fluctuate due to immigration law changes.
 - Lack of regulations on farmworker housing occupancy due to the unintended wage caps and low-income housing regulations.
- Recommendations for change:
 - Increase residential development in communities with access to water resources from Clear Lake (rather than from groundwater).
 - Reduce permit fees for RV, tiny homes, and farm workers' housing.
 - Streamline housing developments for farmworkers/expedite permits for farmworker housing.
 - Consider an ordinance for mobile home park preservation.
 - Promote mobile home parks.
 - Facilitate communications between the County and larger employers regarding housing developments and options.
 - Implement more frequent inspections of residential buildings when they are not in use.
 - Promote temporary rental housing, such as Airbnb and Farm Labor Camps (FLC) options, with subsidies from the County.
 - Lobby Congress to increase off-farm labor housing wage cap, so that when farmworkers receive higher incomes, they still qualify for housing.

What are the farmworker housing related needs and preferences from the employee perspective and the employer perspective?

- Farmworker housing related needs from the employee perspective:
 - Safe and clean living environment.
 - Proximity to services, such as grocery stores and medical care.
 - Housing options close to work.
 - Farmworkers need to be informed of housing practices/ laws and their rights.
 - Resources for seasonal employees to find housing and employment opportunities, including providing information of housing opportunities in Spanish.
 - Streamline farmworker housing.
 - Reduce permit fees for RV, tiny homes, and farm workers' housing.

- Streamline housing developments for farm workers.
- Expedite permits for farmworker housing.
- Farmworker housing related needs from the employer perspective:
 - Adequate housing for more workers on site.
 - Facilitate communications between the County and larger employers regarding housing developments and options.
 - Reduce permit fees for RV, tiny homes, and farm workers' housing.
 - Streamline housing developments for farmworkers, including by expediting permits.

How would you like to see the General Plan support the agricultural economy, including ag tourism?

- Agricultural land preservation.
 - Continue to support the "right to farm ordinance."
 - Acknowledge the significance of permanent crops that have supported generations of families.
- Diversified agricultural crops to include ground food crops, which we have lost.
- Encourage co-location of conventional agriculture and cannabis.
- Consider the impact of cannabis cultivation on other permanent, food crops, and preserve food crop cultivation over cannabis to the extent possible.
- When semi-permanent structures are used on agricultural land, ensure that the land can be converted back to traditional agricultural land.
- Promote the use of greenhouses and hoop houses and streamline permitting and approval for their use.
- Marketing, including promotion of farmers markets with advertising signs on highways.
- Streamline permits for sites that sell produce and for allowing farm-to-table food and beverage service on-site at farms.
- Education and outreach.
 - Educate the public on the benefits of locally farmed goods.
 - Add agriculture as a topic for other outreach events and workshops.
- Responses pertaining to agricultural tourism:
 - Consider implementing cannabis tourism.
 - Continue to support and promote existing agricultural tourism initiatives, including Lake County wine adventure, Pear festival, and Bike races at Six Sigma.
 - Encourage the development of lodging for tourist purposes.
- Extend access to broadband to Scotts Valley area.

What could the County do better to support the agriculture industry or agricultural land preservation?

- Responses pertaining to agricultural land preservation:
 - Avoid converting existing agricultural land to other land uses.
 - Preserve buffer zones that prevent proposed new development from encroaching on agricultural lands.
 - Maintain Right to Farm Act and Williamson Act.
 - Maintain Farmland Protection Zones (FPZ).
- Support research to find other types of crops suited for Lake County's climate as potential options for sustainable agricultural diversification.

- Responses pertaining to funding:
 - Continue pursuing Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation grant (SALC).
 - Seek State and federal funding sources for agricultural land preservation.
- Permit streamlining for farmworker housing.
- Responses pertaining to education and outreach:
 - Continue ongoing workshops that highlight the significance of the local agricultural industry to the public.
 - Increase timely communication about new policies impacting land use and water resources associated with agriculture.
 - Actively seek community input for new policies.
 - Transparent outreach and discussion with the community about issues affecting agriculture.
 - Promote the significance of agriculture in the curriculums of public education.
- Implement monitoring on water supplies to equitably distribute available water resources in response to seasonal change and hitch spawning.
- Emphasize protection of oak trees in policies that address natural resources.
- Expand Lampson Field airport.