

HUMBOLDT COUNTY AGRICULTURE SURVEY FINAL REPORT

November 2003

Agricultural producers, landowners and the general public provide compelling insights and quantitative results on the importance of local agriculture to the economy, environment and quality of life in Humboldt County

Sponsored by the
**Farm Bureau
of Humboldt County**
and
Humboldt State University

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- Farm Bureau of Humboldt County
- Humboldt – Del Norte Cattlemen’s Association
- Buckeye Conservancy
- North Coast Growers Association
- Humboldt Creamery Association
- University of California Cooperative Extension

Many thanks to the dozens of community members who reviewed and edited drafts of the surveys and provided feedback for this report.

Thank you to the producers and the public who took the time to participate in this survey research. Thank you to all the agricultural producers of Humboldt County. Your efforts to protect and best use the land are appreciated. Stay strong for future generations.

Ben Morehead, project director.
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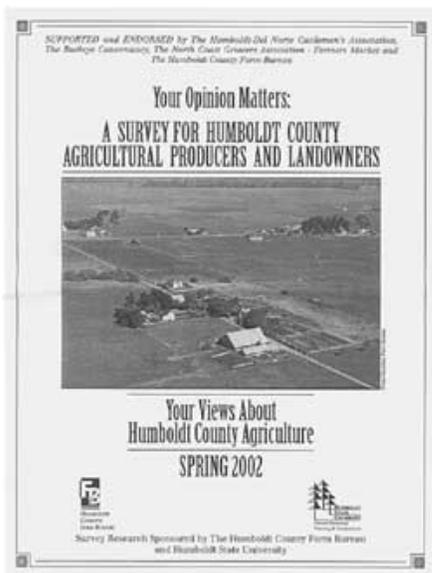
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Executive Summary

Introduction

For the first time in Humboldt County, agricultural producers, landowners and the general public provide compelling and quantitative results on the importance of local agriculture to the economy, environment and quality of life in Humboldt County. Results from the Humboldt County Agriculture Survey, gathered during the summer and fall of 2002, provide a more complete understanding of the values, threats and feasible solutions people hold towards maintaining productive agricultural lands.



The Humboldt County Agriculture Survey examines

- community values about working landscapes
- threats and opportunities in agricultural production
- opinions about Ag land protection policies and programs.

This report focuses the discussion of agricultural land use on the people who value it the most, agricultural landowners and producers in Humboldt County. The survey examines many aspects of agricultural issues

that have never been documented at the county level. A second, separate survey of the county general public also examines attitudes and opinions about agriculture and land use.

The Humboldt County Agriculture Survey was designed to highlight the importance of using agricultural producers' experiences and opinions to help shape county policies and business assistance programs. The factors that most threaten business and agricultural land use are the same factors that threaten the future viability of agricultural production and open space conservation. The solutions most supported by Ag producers may likely produce the best results. In addition, the 'dual survey' method allows for a comparison between public and producer survey results; this can aid local efforts to develop policies and programs that assist agricultural producers and help promote private land conservation while maximizing public benefits.

Information quantified at the county level includes:

- opinions about the social, economic and environmental contributions of agriculture
- attitudes about, and reasons for, the decline of agricultural production and loss of agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses
- producer opinions about regulations, business profitability, and the future of their agricultural properties
- public and producer assessment of local government efforts to protect agriculture
- public and producer willingness to support new policies and programs aimed at protecting productive, private agriculture lands

Background

Humboldt County is located in the northwest corner of coastal California with a population of about 127,000. The total land area is approximately 2.3 million acres, of which approximately 25% is public land and 25% is private agricultural land. Redwood forests, mountains and rivers sit alongside private working landscapes. Rolling pastures and dairies border small coastal cities and highways. Family-owned ranches and farms contribute to the rural quality of life, scenic beauty and local economy. Traditional agriculture consists of grazing beef cattle on coastal rangeland, dairy cows on rich pasture bottomlands around Humboldt Bay, and row crops and orchards on terraced river floodplains. The region's mild and moist climate complement a growing nursery, flower and bulb industry. Humboldt County agriculture products (excluding timber) had a market value of approximately \$140 million in 2001.

Although Humboldt County agricultural production does not compare in quantity or economic value with California's leading agricultural counties (local dairies produce only 1% of California's annual milk products), dairy and ranch lands are "etched more deeply into Humboldt County's cultural and aesthetic landscape than economic data can convey." The ranches that spread out across the vast pastureland surrounding Humboldt Bay, the Eel River and Mad River deltas provide habitat for numerous wildlife and migrating waterfowl. These open spaces inspire both tourists and residents. The following editorial excerpt from Humboldt County's largest daily newspaper addresses the agricultural land conversion threat in more practical terms. "...we have been spared much of this loss [of Ag land] so far. There is still open space between our towns. We have working farms, forests and uncrowded beaches. Our region has a sense of place, our towns their separate identities. It is hard to believe this could ever change, and we may sometimes be a bit smug about the superiority of our life to that of less favored locations. It is well to remember that, a generation ago, residents of Marin and southern Sonoma counties felt the same way about their beautiful landscapes and pretty rural towns. It has taken longer to hit us because we are geographically isolated and our economy has remained, until recently, resource-based. With growth relatively slow, it made better financial sense for owners to keep land in timber or pasture than to subdivide it. ... This will not continue. We can see the changes starting. Many former southern Humboldt ranches and timberland have been subdivided. There are a few farms left in McKinleyville now, and each year sees more development in the Arcata bottoms. The edges of Eureka, Fortuna and Crescent City keep creeping outward into former timber and pasture land... ."

Humboldt County has been incrementally losing agricultural land to development and other non agricultural uses. Between 1965 and 1982, county planners estimate that over 87,000 acres of timber, dairy and ranch lands were lost to agricultural production through the creation of rural residential subdivisions. While the market value of agriculture products increase, larger agricultural operations and the agricultural land base are declining. In the last five-year period studied by the U.S. Census of Agriculture (1992-1997), the number of full-time operating farms declined 13% to 792, and the total acreage in working farms and ranches decreased over 13,000 acres to 584,538 acres. The future of agricultural lands and the accompanying economic, aesthetic, wildlife and public benefits will be determined within the next several years, accentuated by Humboldt County general plan update (expected completion in 2004). Local government uses strong language towards protecting agricultural land (i.e., "the optimum amount of agricultural land shall be conserved for and maintained in agricultural use to promote and increase Humboldt

County's agricultural production"), but there is non-enforcement of existing policies and ambiguous goals.

Although Humboldt County has not yet experienced the rapid loss of farmland to suburban sprawl currently affecting many California counties and the nation as a whole, studies and trends indicate that rural, coastal California counties are very prone to population and development pressures. Humboldt County was recently ranked first in the nation in terms of natural resource amenity values sought after by an increasing number of urban, baby-boomer retirees, and has already been called out by national magazines as a top retirement hot spot with a plethora of outdoor recreation, natural beauty, small town community values and cheap real estate. While population growth is low compared to California counties adjacent to larger urban cities, the pressure to convert land out of agricultural uses has dramatically increased over the past several years. The county's most productive soils are located along the coastal bottomlands surrounding Humboldt Bay and large river floodplains where the demand for residential housing, hobby farms, and public parks is greatest. Large ranches are being sold and subdivided for hobby farms and rural family retreats. Residential housing prices are at an all time high. Home sales in March 2003 were up 20 percent compared to 2002, up 40 percent from 1999 and over 100 percent compared to 1998. Community perception is that residential development and other non agricultural land uses are depleting agricultural resources.

One major obstacle to developing policies and incentives aimed at preserving agricultural lands and open space in Humboldt County is the lack of information about the loss of agricultural lands, the scope of the problem, the level of public sentiment, and the potential of various policy options to conserve agricultural lands. This research demonstrates the benefit of using surveys to assess public values and understand producer issues and opinions about development and conservation opportunities. If land use policies and incentive programs are to be utilized by agricultural landowners, local government needs their support for these programs.

Additional background information is listed in the References section in Part Two of this report.

Methods, Response

The Farm Bureau of Humboldt County, University of California Cooperative Extension and several local agricultural groups including the Cattlemen's Association, Buckeye Conservancy, North Coast Growers Association and Humboldt Creamery Association endorsed this survey and assisted in obtaining the mailing lists of agricultural landowners and producers. Several agricultural producers and community members also participated in reviewing and editing draft surveys. A \$3,765 grant from the Humboldt State University Foundation assisted in survey printing and postage costs. A \$1,000 grant from the Farm Bureau paid for additional survey and report printing costs.

Ag Producer surveys were mailed to 797 eligible and able agricultural producers and landowners. 306 individuals responded by returning completed surveys for a survey response rate of 38%. Public surveys were mailed to 402 county residents. The general public survey mailing list was created from a random sample of Humboldt County registered voters. 190 individuals responded by returning completed surveys for a survey response rate of 47%.

Survey outreach was conducted using a four-phased mailing (following the ‘Dillman’ method). Survey participants were first mailed a pre-survey postcard explaining the survey to come. Survey packets were sent one week later that contained a cover letter, survey questionnaire and a stamped return envelope. Ice cream gift certificates were included in 400 packets. After two weeks, a second postcard was mailed to everyone on the mailing list as a reminder / thank you for participating. One week later, a second complete survey packet was mailed to everyone who had not yet responded. After surveys were returned, results were calculated by entering all survey data into a database and using S.P.S.S. statistical computer software for analysis.

Results Outlined

The following Executive Summary (Part One) highlights themes and general results from both the Ag Producers Survey and the Public Survey. Part Two categorizes and describes survey results in several sections based on key variables such as producer type or acreage. These sections are outlined in detail on the Contents page. Also included in Part Two is a list of compelling comments quoted from survey respondents, and additional references and background information. Part Three includes the complete list of all survey questions and results from both the Producer and the Public survey.

Agricultural Landowners and Producers Results

Almost 375,000 acres are represented in the ‘Ag Producers’ survey. This includes 69 producers managing 1,000 acres or more, and 48 producers working 10 acres or less. Major producer groups include dairy, beef, nursery, row crop, fruit, and timber.

Agricultural landowners and producers highlight three factors as the *major threats* to a viable future for agricultural production in Humboldt County. These are:

- 1) Limited / decreasing land availability
- 2) Regulations
- 3) Marginal profits



Available Ag land, regulatory costs and marginal profits are interrelated factors influencing an uncertain future for many landowners. Cumulatively, these factors threaten the future viability of agricultural operations and related businesses in Humboldt County. When properties go up for sale, family financial needs from health care to retirement or estate taxes are often a priority. In a real estate market where agricultural land values are a far second to residential and speculative development land values, the future transfer of agricultural properties in Humboldt County will continue to result in a cumulative loss of Ag land.

Uncertain Future for Agriculture

83% of producers surveyed agree that agricultural lands (i.e., dairy farms and cattle ranches) should be used by future generations for agriculture and not converted to non-agricultural uses like residential subdivisions. Producers want land to stay in agriculture. The vast majority of producers hope for a strong future for agriculture, however, age, finances and real estate development values are established factors that lead to the loss of farmland across the U.S.

- **40% of producers do not have an heir to continue their Ag operations**
- **45% are over 60 years, nearing retirement**
- **65% do not have an estate plan**
- **18%, totaling over 28,000 acres, may sell their land within 5 years**
- **32%, totaling over 79,000 acres, may sell their land within 15 years**

Threats to Agricultural Production, Working Landscapes

Limited Land Availability: a strong majority of producers agree that land available for agriculture is decreasing; this threatens the future viability of agricultural production. A critical mass of land is needed to sustain dairy and cattle producers that supply local production cooperatives, employ local people, and utilize local businesses. When land decreases so do the number of producers and Ag businesses.

- 92% of producers agree that current real estate prices have made it difficult to purchase or lease land for agricultural production
- 84% agree that residential development is reducing the amount of Ag land available for production
- While 57% believe they need to expand their Ag operations to increase profits, 81% agree that land availability is currently limiting producers from expanding operations
- 84% agree that the loss of Ag land is a *present* threat to county Ag production; 94% agree that the loss of Ag land will be a *future* threat
- 83% agree that public land acquisition is reducing the amount of available Ag land; 88% agree that local Ag lands purchased by government are not used effectively
- 22% of producers agree that their operations are presently restricted by adjacent non-Ag land uses



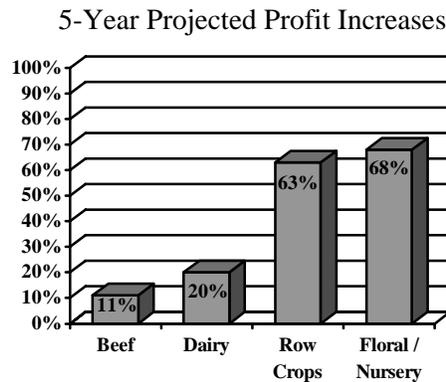
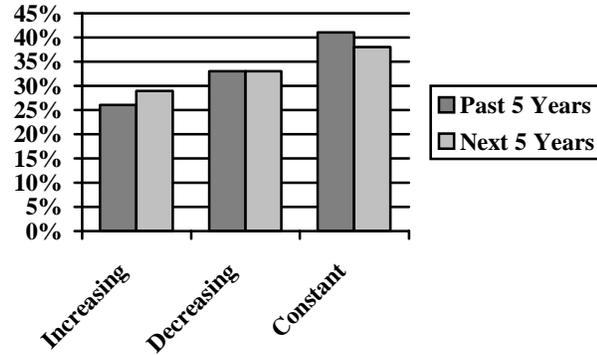
Regulations: a strong majority of producers agree that agency regulations hinder Ag business profitability and threaten family-run agricultural operations. Nonetheless, a significant majority agree that appropriate regulations are needed to secure productive Ag lands from conversion to other uses.

- 71% of producers feel over regulated by agencies
- 50% of producers agree that regulations have forced them to consider selling their land or retiring
- 73% agree that regulations limit their ability to make business and land improvements to their Ag operations
- While 41% agree that water quality regulations negatively impact their business, 48% agree that these same water quality regulations help the environment
- 79% agree that ‘appropriate’ regulations can make a positive contribution to Ag production and land use, and 20% agree that current regulations have helped their Ag operations



Marginal Profits: Survey results conclude that the majority of local producers are financially ‘just making it’. Marginal profits threaten continued operations and are a key factor in a landowner’s decision to sell their land.

- Less than one-third of producers had increasing profits over the past five years and less than one-third expect increasing profits over the next five years
- 84% with decreasing profits expect the same or worse in the next five years (things aren’t getting better)
- Only a small minority of dairy and beef producers (our county’s largest private Ag landowners) expect increasing profits over the next five years
- 97% of producers have made business improvements to increase profits over the past five years and 75% buy over half their equipment and supplies locally



Private Lands, Public Benefits

A significant majority of producers agree that private agriculture provides important economic, environmental and ‘quality of life’ public benefits. A strong majority also agree that Ag land conversion is a public issue. 28% of producers surveyed view the conversion of private Ag land to non-Ag uses as entirely a private matter, while 72% agree that Ag land conversion is a community issue.

- 91% agree private Ag lands provide ‘public benefits’
- 97% agree Ag lands provide wildlife habitat
- 98% agree Ag lands contribute to rural quality of life
- 98% agree Ag lands contribute to our county’s scenic beauty and open space
- 72% state they have done ‘restoration’ work on their properties without government assistance

Protecting Agriculture

Producers ranked several policies and programs aimed at maintaining productive agricultural lands in Humboldt County. The **#1 approach is improving the agricultural economy** (marketing, diversification), followed by **#2 tax relief** (i.e., Williamson Act), **#3 controlling land use** (i.e., zoning), **#4 Ag conservation easements**, **#5 cost-share land improvement programs**, and **#6 commodity support**.

- 87% of producers agree increasing local markets for products will increase local production and business
- 80% agree to producing a different product with potential for increased profits
- 77% are willing to produce and sell ‘value-added’ products



Economic growth strategies ranked above tax relief and land use policy as the most viable means to keeping Ag land productive. Producers are overwhelmingly supportive of innovative marketing programs that will assist in developing new market niches and increase profits. When business is strong, land is much more likely to stay in agriculture.

Government, Zoning, and Conservation Easements

Producers responded to a variety of survey questions about local government efforts, zoning and a hypothetical ‘purchase of development rights’ program (conservation easements), in which landowners would be compensated for giving up their right to subdivide land, keeping it intact for agricultural production into the future. Overall, producers feel that local government should better use zoning and conservation easements to help stop the loss of productive agricultural lands.

Local Government

- 68% agree local government does not presently place a priority on protecting Ag land
- 74% agree local government should take more responsibility to assist producers
- 60% agree the pace of Ag land conversion to development is ‘too fast’, while 23% agree to the current pace as being ‘about right’
- 54% believe local agricultural interests are not represented in local government



Zoning: Although ‘zoning’ did not rank as high as economics as a method towards sustaining agriculture, producers want to see stronger agricultural zoning that works to protect land from conversion to non agricultural uses.

- 81% agree county Ag zoning is a good way to keep land secure for future production
- 78% agree that ‘urban growth boundaries’ should be developed around residential centers that promote residential growth within the boundary and promote exclusive Ag use outside

Conservation Easements

- 77% support Ag conservation easements and the concept of a ‘Purchase of Development Rights’ (PDR) program in which landowners would be compensated for giving up their right to subdivide land for non-Ag uses, keeping their land committed to agriculture
- 70% support the use of existing state and federal PDR programs for funding
- 44% support a local sales tax fund to support this hypothetical program
- Asked how they’d spend cash received from participation in a PDR program, the #1 response was ‘to save for retirement’, followed by #2 ‘invest in Ag property’, and #3 ‘buy additional Ag equipment’

A significant majority of agricultural producers agree that local government should do more to assist producers and protect productive agricultural land from conversion to non-agricultural uses. In addition to economic development and growth, both zoning and conservation easements are supported as means to keeping Ag land secure for future production. Funding is the most limiting factor in many PDR programs. Other northern California counties, such as Marin and Sonoma, have locally funded Ag conservation easement programs.

General Public Results

Similar to the Ag Producers Survey, a separate Public Survey was administered to a sample of the county general public. The Public Survey focuses on public values toward private agricultural land and on acceptable solutions for sustaining agricultural lands into the future. It did not go into detail about perceived threats to agricultural production or familiarity with current protection policies.

Attitudes About Agriculture

Although a majority (56%) of the public agrees that they are not familiar with local agricultural issues, and only a small minority (15%) understand that family-run farms and ranches make up the vast majority of local agricultural operations in the county, a strong majority of the general public places high value on the need to preserve agricultural lands in the county for production and open space benefits.

- 94% agree it is important to keep agricultural lands in production versus being developed for non-agricultural uses
- 72% expect the amount of Ag land to ‘decrease’ or ‘decrease significantly’ within 10 years
- 84% agree that pressure from residential development is reducing the amount of Ag land
- 79% agree that the loss of Ag land is a present threat to county Ag production
- 47% feel the current pace of Ag land being lost to development is ‘too fast’ while 38% are ‘not sure’



Private Lands, Public Benefits

A strong majority of the public feels that private agricultural businesses and working landscapes provide considerable public benefits. These benefits include passive and aesthetic use values which are often overlooked when evaluating the costs and benefits of land use development proposals.

- 88% agree private Ag lands provide public benefits
- 96% agree Ag lands are valuable to our county’s rural quality and character
- 56% agree Ag landowners should be compensated to protect and enhance the public benefits their properties provide

Government, Zoning, and Conservation Easements

The *public* responded to a variety of questions about local government, zoning ordinances and a hypothetical ‘purchase of development rights’ program (Ag conservation easements) in which landowners would be compensated for giving up their right to subdivide land out of agricultural production.

- While 44% agree local government does not place a priority on protecting Ag lands, 81% agree more should be done to limit Ag land conversion; 73% agree local government should give Ag land and open space protection a high priority
- 83% agree stronger zoning should be used to prevent the conversion of Ag lands to non Ag uses
- 70% agree that ‘urban growth boundaries’ should be developed around residential centers that promote residential growth within the boundary and promote Ag production outside (15% ‘disagree’, 15% ‘unsure’)
- 71% support the concept of a ‘Purchase of Development Rights’ program in which landowners would be compensated for giving up their right to subdivide land for non-Ag uses, keeping Ag land committed to agricultural production
- While 68% agree we should target existing state and federal PDR programs for funding, 47% agree to a hypothetical local sales tax to fund such a program and 46% agree to contribute voluntarily to fund such a program

Protecting Public Open Spaces Versus Private Ag Lands

The public was asked to differentiate between conserving land for private agricultural use and conserving land for public open space use. Results illustrate: 1) the different values placed on landscapes with different intended uses, and 2) the need for agricultural groups to engage public support for the economic and wildlife benefits of private Ag lands.

- 88% agree that open space is a resource to keep available for wildlife habitat and recreation; 84% agree that open space is a resource to keep available for Ag production
- 75% agree that saving land for wildlife habitat should be given equal or higher priority compared to saving land for agricultural uses

The public was asked to rank specific reasons for conserving ‘Public Open Spaces’ versus ‘Private Ag Lands’ in Humboldt County. Results indicate clear differences in how the public perceives certain types of land conservation. Ag lands often provide many of the same benefits as public open spaces, but the public may not acknowledge this.

Private Ag Lands

- #1. Local Ag products for consumers
- #2. Help preserve family farms
- #3. Preserve rural, scenic qualities
- #4. Slow down, control development

Public Open Spaces

- #1. Protect wildlife habitat
- #2. Protect rivers and water quality
- #3. Provide access and recreation
- #4. Preserve rural, scenic qualities

Comparing Results: Producers and the Public

The ‘Producers’ Survey and the ‘Public’ Survey were conducted separately, but concurrently; both the producers and the public were asked many of same questions. This ‘duel survey method’ allows for comparisons to be made between groups, resulting in a more complete understanding of community perspectives on local agriculture. The following results demonstrate compelling consistencies between the public and the producers on key issues. Both agricultural producers and the general public perceive the loss of agricultural land as a current threat to local production, open space and rural quality of life. Both groups support a more determined effort by local government to utilize agricultural zoning, conservation easements and economic development programs.

	<u>Public</u>	<u>Producers</u>
Pace of Ag land conversion is ‘too fast’	47%	60%
Pace of Ag land conversion is ‘about right’	15%	23%
In 10 years, county Ag production will decrease	72%	70%
In 10 years, county Ag production will increase	4%	12%
Private Ag lands provide ‘public benefits’	88%	91%
Ag lands are valuable to rural quality and character	96%	98%
Local gov. is concerned about protecting Ag land	44%	33%
Local gov. should focus more on protecting Ag land	81%	74%
Support for stronger Ag exclusive zoning	83%	81%
Support for Urban Growth Boundaries	70%	78%
Support for hypothetical PDR program	71%	77%
PDR funding through existing state / federal programs	68%	70%
PDR funding through local sales tax increase	47%	44%
Who to manage PDR program: land trust	43%	54%
Who to manage PDR program: local government	36%	12%

Discussion and Recommendations

The Humboldt County Agriculture Survey was designed in part by local agricultural producers and land conservation planners to assess the present and future status of agriculture from all sides of the community. The survey achieved several goals and quantifiable results, including:

- community benefits from Ag
- landowner opinions about the future viability of Ag production
- similarities and differences between the public and the producers
- information that can be used to develop both producer and public outreach programs



Survey results confirm what many residents have seen coming: Humboldt County agricultural producers are threatened more than ever. Available and affordable agricultural land is decreasing, regulations limit profits, producers are aging closer to retirement and land is continually being converted to non agricultural uses. Survey results, combined with data on farmland loss from the U.S.D.A. Agriculture Census for Humboldt County, project an unattractive future for local agriculture. The success of local family-run Ag operations go hand in hand with the conservation of agricultural landscapes.

These landscapes of dairy farms, and cattle pastures, wild ranches and nursery and vegetable farms provide numerous and diverse public benefits from economic to aesthetic to biological. Survey results conclude that both the producers and the public strongly value these landscapes. All types of people are willing to support zoning policies, local public financing and economic development programs to protect local agriculture. Survey results should convey a strong message to agricultural advocacy groups, local

government and residents that now is the time to plan and implement actions aimed at preserving productive agricultural lands. Survey results can be used as a starting point from which to discuss innovative incentive-based and regulatory approaches toward protecting the agricultural landscapes of Humboldt County.

Survey results suggest that a large amount of Ag property will transfer ownership within the next 15 years; this transfer will lead to the cumulative loss of Ag land. The main reason for the sale of many family farms and ranches is economic necessity due to regulations, estate taxes, retirement, property transfer, industry or declining profits. Economics is also the solution. If business is strong, land will stay in agriculture even in

U.S.D.A. Ag. Census 1992-1997

- **Lost over 13,000 acres to 584,538 total Ag acres**
- **# Farms down by 82, to 792 total operating farms**
- **Full-time Farms down 13% to 417**
- **County farmland down from 34% in 1964 to 25% in 1997**

the transfer of property ownership. Survey results confirm that producers need a better balance of regulations and their associated costs. There is also a significant need for estate planning within the agricultural community.

Survey results have implications for many different audiences, including local agricultural advocacy groups, local government, the general public, and Humboldt County producers. Survey results conclude that producers themselves are not familiar with many of the Ag land protection policies and programs currently in place, including traditional agricultural zoning, tax relief programs, as well as conservation easements and estate planning. Local government needs to gain the support and trust of both the public and the producers before moving forward with any new policy or program. Survey results can contribute to a feasibility study of a county program aimed at preventing the permanent conversion of productive agricultural working landscapes. Local agriculture advocacy groups need to continue to turn outward for support. Through additional media outreach, public events and educational campaigns, agricultural groups need to connect with the public on issues surrounding wildlife, water quality and local economic contributions.

Survey Result Recommendations to Local Agricultural Groups:

- Collaborate together to better connect with the public on key issues. These include: 1) local economic contributions of agricultural businesses and the open spaces conserved, and 2) wildlife habitat contributions and water quality improvements on local agricultural lands.
- Inform and educate Ag landowners about current and potential land protection policies and programs. A more informed citizenry will play a more active role in county planning decisions affecting their future.
- Stand united under one policy and program recommendation memorandum to county government.

Survey Result Recommendations to Local Government:

- Strengthen efforts towards producer participation before developing new county policies aimed at preserving agricultural lands.
- Humboldt County Board of Supervisors to appoint a Farmland Conservation Committee to evaluate the following options: 1) Reevaluate Ag zoning ordinances and urban growth boundary lines, 2) Establish an Ag conversion ordinance with objective criteria, 3) Publicize the right-to-farm ordinance to new homeowners, 4) No net loss of prime Ag land enforced and evaluated through annual review of zoning conversions, presented in County Ag Commissioners Crop Report, 5) inform landowners about Williamson Act benefits and reduce contract fees, 6) address the public acquisitions of productive Ag lands, and 7) assess the potential for a funded conservation easement program.

- Work on behalf of agricultural producers to loosen the impact that state and federal regulations are placing on many agricultural operations. A working group of agency staff and landowners, convened by county officials, is a starting point.
- Develop an Ag economic development strategy to support local businesses through marketing and product diversification strategies. Niche marketing and value-added product cooperatives are ways producers can achieve greater profits. A working group of county staff and industry representatives would produce a starting point of creative possibilities.

With support from both producers and the general public, steps must be taken now to sustain a viable agricultural industry for future generations. Next steps for the Farm Bureau include collaborating with local Ag groups to develop a list of common policy recommendations and a public outreach campaign, convening a public forum to publicize the survey and recommendations, and meetings with agencies and local government to promote a viable future for agriculture.

Results of the Humboldt County Agriculture Survey were released in September 2003. The complete Final report includes all Public survey and Producer survey questions and results broken down into producer groups, acre groups, zip code groups, as well as convincing producer and public written comments. This report is available on the internet at: **www.buckeyeconservancy.org**

The Humboldt County Farm Bureau is moving forward in various ways. These include:

- Making the full survey report and all data available online
- Carrying out an ongoing media campaign to bring Ag issues and recommendations to the attention of a broader audience
- Using survey results and recommendations with local agency planners and economic development efforts
- Collaborating with individuals and organizations to bring the results and recommendations to key audiences and to engage them in using the results and recommendations

The Humboldt County Agriculture Survey project was developed, directed and reported on by Ben Morehead, farm bureau project consultant and Humboldt State University graduate student. Research, results and background presented in this report are also presented in his graduate degree thesis report listed in the References section.

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