



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 6/2/2026

To: Board of Supervisors and Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Department or Agency Name(s): Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures, Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, County Counsel, County Executive's Office, Permit Sonoma, University of California Cooperative Extension

Staff Name and Phone Number: Andrew Smith (707) 565-2371, Misti Arias, Jennifer Klein, Andrew Sturmfels, Scott Orr, Lauren Cartwright

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

In Support of the Agricultural Industry of Sonoma County - Resolution and Workplan

Recommended Action:

Adopt a Joint Resolution recognizing a crisis challenging the Sonoma County agricultural industry that includes:

- A. Board of Supervisors directing a multi-departmental workplan in support of Sonoma County policy related to agricultural land use.
- B. Board of Directors directing the General Manager of Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to partner with Sonoma County to implement specific components of the workplan related to land conservation and access.

Executive Summary:

Sonoma County's agricultural industry, which represents critical infrastructure and a cornerstone of our economy, identity, and environmental stewardship - is facing a crisis. Vineyard sector market pressure and subsequent removals, declining commodity prices, labor shortages, water constraints, climate volatility, and rising operational costs are placing extraordinary pressures on all sectors within the industry.

Recent trends indicate significant reduction in vineyard acreage (2,711 acres have been removed and replant permits authorizing removal totaling 5,032 acres), increases in the number of closures of agricultural production and processing facilities, and reduced profitability across all agricultural sectors, including winegrapes, dairy (reduction in number of dairies from 60 in 2018 to 47 in 2026), and short-term increases in diversified crops. Without coordinated, multi-agency intervention, these challenges threaten not only individual livelihoods and agricultural land but the longer-term viability and broader economic stability, food security, and environmental health of Sonoma County.

Today's item requests the Board adopt a joint resolution recognizing the crisis being faced by the agricultural

industry in Sonoma County and approve a multi-departmental workplan through which staff will prioritize efforts supporting the agricultural industry and land use in Sonoma County.

Discussion:

Agriculture contributes substantially to Sonoma County's economy, generating billions in annual production value, ancillary businesses and value addition along the supply chain, as well as supporting thousands of jobs. Over the past several years, the industry has experienced compounding pressures leading to anxiety and uncertainty throughout the industry.

During the Agriculture Workshop on April 14, 2026, the Board heard from staff, industry stakeholders, and the public on nine priority topic areas: Cultivation and Fallowing; Agritourism; General Plan and By-Right Uses; Agricultural Employee Housing; Right to Farm; Williamson Act; Conservation Easements; Land Access; and Food Security.

Based on direction provided by the Board during the Workshop and in collaboration with the Agriculture in Sonoma County Ad Hoc Committee members, Supervisors Gore and Hopkins, staff from the Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures (AWM), Agricultural Preservation + Open Space District (Ag + Open Space), County Counsel, County Executive's Office (CEO), Permit Sonoma, and UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) developed a workplan. This workplan describes efforts that can be completed in the next twelve months (FY 2026-27), in the next 24 months (FY 2027-28), and beyond through the General Plan Update process.

AWM Workplan

FY 2026-27

- Direct AWM staff to evaluate and bring forward minor amendments to Sonoma County Code Chapter 36, Vineyard Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance (VESCO) that enable growers' greater options for rotating and changing crops by recognizing cultivated lands as being eligible for replant permits.
- Direct staff to develop guidelines for fallowing that can be incorporated into Sonoma County Code Chapter 36, Vineyard Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance (VESCO) replant standards, Best Management Practices (BMPs), and Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) Uniform Rules, as applicable, to allow farmers more flexibility in their active land management and production.

Permit Sonoma Workplan

FY 2026-27

- Develop Low Impact Camping Area (LICA) Ordinance to support and promote Sonoma County agriculture.
- Update Zoning Code Event Thresholds. These updates include code amendments that would not have physical impacts on the landscape.
- Develop Resources for New Ag Housing Regulations and Department Contacts for Permit Support.
- Protect Agricultural Operations in County Noise Ordinance.

FY 2027-28

- Update Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones (Williamson Act). This update should consider amendments to allowed uses for contracted land, fallowing, definitions, and eligible parcel sizes to encourage continued protection of agricultural lands in Sonoma County.

FY 2028-29

- Complete General Plan Update. Anticipated for completion in January 2029, the General Plan Update process shall include:
 - Environmental review of all agricultural uses, including current discretionary uses, for consideration as “By Right” uses.
 - Environmental review of visitor serving uses and event criteria including exemptions below certain thresholds.
 - Update agricultural definitions including new definitions for Small Scale uses to create a variety of permit tiers.

Ag + Open Space Workplan

FY 2026-27

- Modernize and simplify conservation easement language to support agritourism and production.
- Implement affirmative agricultural easements.
- Evaluate affordability tools to potentially incorporate into agricultural land conservation projects (such as limitations on residential use and requiring sale at agricultural value).
- Develop Stewardship Assistance Program in partnership with Gold Ridge and Sonoma Resource Conservation Districts and open first grant cycle.
- Acquire a property for the Buy Protect Sell Program.
- Acquire a property suitable for an Ag Park - publicly owned land that could host an incubator, ensure secure affordable leases, support food security, and provide recreational and educational opportunities.
- Evaluate Ag + Open Space owned lands for agricultural use and make recommendations to the board, including long-term leases.

FY 2027-28

- Pilot affordability tools in agricultural land conservation and land access projects, including restricting land use rights of value.
- Provide affordable agricultural leases of Ag + Open Space owned lands where feasible and compatible with conservation values.
- Evaluate Buy Protect Lease Sell option for Buy Protect Sell Program.
- Conduct a public process to inform the use of the Ag Park.

- Identify additional opportunities for long-term secure leases on publicly owned lands.
- Support farmworker co-ops and organizations in acquiring and/or accessing land.
- Provide a second round of Stewardship Assistance Grants.

FY 2028-29

- Make Ag Park available for agricultural use and production.
- Evaluate effectiveness of Stewardship Assistance Program and make recommendations to the Board.

UCCE Workplan

FY 2025-26

- Host Food Security convening to (1) learn directly from County partners about the anticipated impacts in Sonoma County from HR1 on the Cal Fresh program and (2) revisit recommendations from the 2024 Food Distribution Assessment.
- Direct staff to identify long-term sustainability of Community-Based Food Networks and the ability to shift from emergency feeding to chronic hunger to inform long-term policy impacts.

FY 2026-27

- Work with County Legislative Affairs to clearly identify opportunities for agriculture and food security and consider revised outline/definition of Agriculture and Natural Resources in county legislative platform.
- Review existing resources and establish a workplan for the Agricultural Ombuds program to realign support for agricultural stakeholders based on current needs. Reassess workplan as issues emerge with the agricultural community over time.

Other items for Consideration

Prohibiting Targeted Residential Picketing

The Board may consider directing staff to bring back an ordinance prohibiting picketing targeted at and in proximity to a specific residence. In general, picketing is protected speech under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and under Article I § 2 of the California Constitution. In a public forum like public residential streets and sidewalks, the key considerations in regulating picketing are that the regulation be content-neutral, be narrowly tailored to serve a significant government interest, and leave open ample alternative channels of communication. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld an ordinance prohibiting picketing targeted at a particular residential dwelling finding that residential privacy was a significant interest, that the ordinance was narrowly tailored because it only prohibited targeted picketing, and that it left open many other channels for people to disseminate their message (*Frisby v. Schultz* (1988) 487 U.S. 474). The California Court of Appeals similarly upheld a city ordinance prohibiting targeted picketing within 300 feet of the dwelling (*City of San Jose v. Superior Court* (1995) 32 Cal. App. 4th 330.). A number of jurisdictions have adopted ordinances prohibiting targeted residential picketing including the County of Riverside, County of San Diego, City of San Diego, City of Solano Beach, City of Los Angeles, Town of Los Gatos, City of Sacramento, City of Riverside, and the City of San

Marino.

Regulation of Drones

At the April workshop, commenters raised a desire for protection from, or local regulation of, private use of drones used to observe or record agricultural operations. The County has a few regulatory and enforcement tools in this regard, but it is likely that none provide a complete solution to the issue as explained below.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has exclusive authority over aviation safety, flight paths, and navigable airspace. However, a local ordinance regulating the private use of drones may impose community-based safety requirements and restrictions on the operation of drones that are not preempted by federal aviation rules or authority, or state law, and only where it is necessary to mitigate such risks and to protect the public from the hazards associated with the operation of drones. For those reasons, local governments are generally limited to regulating the takeoff and landing of drones. For example, a local ordinance could provide that no person shall take off or land a drone in a reckless manner so as to create a substantial risk of serious injury to any person or substantial risk of damage to the property of another. It could also provide that no person may take off or land a drone on private property without the permission of the landowner. It could also prohibit the takeoff or landing of drones on County property. There are several jurisdictions, including Sonoma County, that already prohibit the interference of drones with emergency response activities and operations (See Sonoma County Code Section 19-63). The FAA imposes no fly zones near airports and other sensitive areas or hazards, defines various classes of airspace where drones may fly, and imposes a 400 feet above-ground-level height limit on the flight of drones. The federal government has exclusive regulatory jurisdiction around airspace safety, licensing and certification of drone operators, and the registration of unmanned vehicles. Under FAA rules, drones are generally permitted to fly in the navigable airspace above private property without the landowner's permission.

The protection of privacy interests with respect to drones and drone-based photography is governed by state law. California Civil Code Section 1708.8 provides a private right of action for invasions of privacy against those who enter upon the land or airspace of another or commit trespass in an attempt to capture visual images, sounds, or other physical impressions of a private, personal, or familial activity, as defined. The statute also authorizes the County to initiate an action for civil penalties to enforce violations. The use of a device to capture such physical impressions also constitutes an invasion of privacy, regardless of trespass if the physical impression could not be captured without the use of the device. California Penal Code also imposes criminal penalties for willfully operating a drone over disasters and emergency operations (Penal Code Section 402) and for voyeurism (Penal Code Section 647(j)(1).) Most of these state level protections rely on the concept of a "reasonable expectation of privacy" and would not be generally applicable to commercial or agricultural operations where there is no residence or private, personal activity. Violations of trespass or nuisance laws may still be pursued even where there is no invasion of privacy at issue.

Pursuit of a local ordinance regulating the takeoff and landing of drones, coupled with initiating enforcement

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actions under state law for administrative fines in appropriate cases, could be pursued in support of not just agricultural property owners, but the public generally, likely providing at least a partial solution to the issue raised at the Workshop.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board adopt the joint resolution recognizing the crisis facing the agricultural industry and approve the multi-agency workplan supporting agricultural land use policy in Sonoma County.

Strategic Plan:

N/A

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Prior Board Actions:

April 14, 2026 - Agriculture Workshop ([SONOMA COUNTY - File #: 2026-0484 <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7979095&GUID=66C27579-5DDD-4893-9D3B-C806592B6DB7&Options=&Search=>](https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7979095&GUID=66C27579-5DDD-4893-9D3B-C806592B6DB7&Options=&Search=>))

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

There are no fiscal impacts associated with this item.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

There are no staffing impacts associated with this item.

Attachments:

Joint Resolution

PowerPoint Presentation

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None