

**GOAL 3**

**AGRICULTURAL LANDS**

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The residents of Benton County value...the land – its beauty and life-sustaining qualities.

Agricultural and forest lands provide sustenance for residents of the Willamette Valley. These lands and the larger systems of mountains, valleys, rivers and wetlands of which they are part continue to be highly prized economically, culturally, recreationally, environmentally and aesthetically.

Benton County Comprehensive Plan Value Statement

# GOAL 3

## AGRICULTURAL LANDS

### Overview

A significant portion of Benton County is situated within one of Oregon's most productive agricultural areas - the Willamette Valley. It is important to county citizens that productive agricultural lands are available to meet current needs as well as provide resources for future generations.

One of the founding concepts of the statewide planning program was a priority for preserving the agricultural land base. Reflecting this statewide value, Oregon statutes and administrative rules mandate exclusive farm use zoning for lands meeting certain characteristics. Most of the land use regulations affecting agricultural land are dictated by state laws; nonetheless, there are limited areas where Benton County can influence how agricultural lands are managed.

The policies within this chapter define the manner in which agricultural lands are preserved and maintained in Benton County. The County's land development regulations, which must comply with Oregon Revised Statutes, Chapter 215, provide the primary basis upon which this goal is accomplished. These policies provide for additional methods that promote sustainable practices, minimize conflicting uses and protect valued features and habitats as viable means to preserve and maintain agricultural lands. The County recognizes and supports the essential role of other key organizations in accomplishing this goal.

### Cross-References

Additional policies related to this goal:

- Goal 2 Land Use Planning
- Goal 5 Natural Resources
- Goal 9 Economic Development
- Goal 15 Willamette River Greenway



# GOAL 3

## Statewide Planning Goal 3

**To preserve and maintain agricultural lands.**

Agricultural lands shall be preserved and maintained for farm use, consistent with existing and future needs for agricultural products, forest and open space and with the state's agricultural land use policy expressed in ORS 215.243 and 215.700.

### PLANNING GUIDELINES

Urban growth should be separated from agricultural lands by buffer or transitional areas of open space.

Plans providing for the preservation and maintenance of farm land for farm use, should consider as a major determinant the carrying capacity of the air, land and water resources of the planning area. The land conservation and development actions provided for by such plans should not exceed the carrying capacity of such resources.

Excerpt from  
OAR 660-015-0000(3)

## County Boards & Committees

Farm Board of Review

## Benton County Goal

# Agricultural Lands

**To preserve and maintain agricultural lands and to support agriculture for production and conservation.**



# AGRICULTURAL LANDS

## Policies

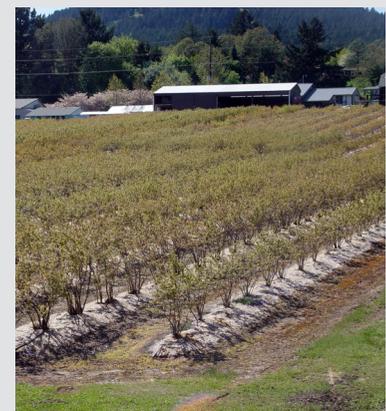
- 3.1.1** Agricultural lands as defined by Statewide Planning Goal 3, which are not developed or committed to non-farm uses, shall be protected with appropriate resource designations on the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Maps. Comprehensive Plan Map amendments from “Agriculture” to a non-resource designation shall require an exception to Goal 3.
- 3.1.2** Benton County shall encourage open space and conservation uses as an appropriate means to preserve natural resources on agricultural lands and to retain options for future agricultural activities.
- 3.1.3** The “Multi-Purpose Agriculture” Comprehensive Plan designation and zone shall be applied only to areas in the Alsea and Lobster Valleys.
- 3.1.4** Benton County shall minimize conflicts between residential development and agricultural lands by requiring setbacks for residences adjacent to agricultural lands.
- 3.1.5** Benton County shall encourage sustainable agricultural practices.
- 3.1.6** Benton County shall participate in programs that allow property owners to maintain agricultural property tax deferral where valued habitat areas are protected.
- 3.1.7** Benton County shall encourage the preservation of valued natural features such as wetlands and wildlife habitat.
- 3.1.8** Benton County shall provide support for organizations such as the Oregon State University Benton County Extension Service and the Benton County Soil and Water Conservation District, which implement special projects and provide technical assistance to farm and forest owners.
- 3.1.9** Benton County shall encourage locally grown and marketed agricultural products.
- 3.1.10** For agricultural lands, soil capability shall be a prime factor used by Benton County in making land use decisions.

## 3.1 General Policies

### Defined Terms

- conservation
- exception
- Multi-Purpose Agriculture
- open space
- sustainable
- tax deferral
- wetlands
- wildlife habitat
- zone

See Appendix for definitions



# GOAL 3

## Findings and References

**3.1.a** The mild climate and fertile soils make the Willamette Valley one of the state's most productive agricultural areas. Between 1982 and 1992, a total of 88,900 acres of agricultural land statewide were converted to residential and urban use.

U. S. Soil Conservation Service, 1994 Natural Resource Inventory (unpublished)

**3.1.b** Out of 36 Oregon Counties, Benton County ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in gross farm and ranch sales for 2003, at \$90,790,000.

Oregon Department of Agriculture

**3.1.c** Oregon Statewide Planning Goal 3 requires a minimum parcel size of 80 acres for Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) lands, in compliance with ORS 215.243, and a minimum parcel size of 20 acres for Multi-Purpose Agricultural (MPA) lands.

**3.1.d** Some agricultural lands, especially those that are marginal, may be better suited to conservation or open space uses. Retaining agricultural land in an undeveloped state allows for future agricultural uses.

**3.1.e** The narrow valley widths, steep hillsides, and social and economic factors limit the agricultural capabilities of farm land in Alsea and Lobster Valley. Parcel sizes less than the 80 acres required by ORS 215.243 have been allowed (minimum parcel size is 20 acres) in these areas.

**3.1.f** Rural residential activities adjacent to agricultural lands can result in compatibility conflicts.

**3.1.g** The Benton County Sustainability Policy encourages County residents to use, develop, and protect our resources at a rate and in a manner that enables people to meet their current needs and also preserve resources for future generations.

Benton County Sustainability Policy, 2002

**3.1.h** Property zoned for exclusive farm use or mixed farm and forest use is eligible for the Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program. Landowners who manage their property for wildlife habitat may receive a property tax benefit through this program.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

**3.1.i** Some lands designated for agricultural use contain natural features such as rock outcroppings, wetlands, and wildlife habitat.

**3.1.j** The Oregon State University Benton County Extension Service and the Benton Soil and Water Conservation District provide education and assistance to county farmers and forest owners.

**3.1.k** Out of 36 Oregon Counties, Benton County ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in production of Christmas trees for 2003.

National Agricultural Statistics Service

## References

Benton County. Administrative Services Department. *Benton County Sustainability Policy*. Administrative Policy No. 02-01. 2002.

Benton County. Community Development Department. *Background Reports for the Benton County Comprehensive Plan*. December 1979.

Benton County. Community Development Department. *Benton County Comprehensive Plan Value Statement*. Steering Committee, Benton County Plan Update. December 6, 2004.

Benton County. Community Development Department. *Benton County Comprehensive Plan*. Last printed October 8, 1992.