



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COUNTY OF BUTTE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Resolution No. 17-182

A RESOLUTION OF THE BUTTE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ACCEPTING THE BUTTE COUNTY SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL LANDS CONSERVATION (SALC) STRATEGY

WHEREAS, State Assembly Bill (AB) 32 (2006), the Global Warming Solutions Act and subsequent state legislation and executive orders direct public agencies to support statewide goals for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; and

WHEREAS, Butte County recognizes a compelling need for a local approach to reduce GHG emissions within the local community; and

WHEREAS, the Butte County General Plan establishes Conservation and Open Space Element Goal COS-1, directing the County to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020; and

WHEREAS, as documented in the Butte County Climate Action Plan, in 2006 the Butte County agricultural sector was its largest emitter of greenhouse gases, emitting 390,400 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents; and

WHEREAS, however, when compared acre by acre, agriculture is a lower producer of greenhouse gas emissions than urban uses; and

WHEREAS, agriculture's contribution to Butte County's greenhouse gas emissions inventory reflects the large extent of agriculture in Butte County, with over 500,000 acres in some form of agricultural production in 2006; and

WHEREAS, in fact, in 2006 agricultural practices in Butte County emitted less than 1 metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalents per acre of existing agricultural land; and

WHEREAS, each average acre of new residential, commercial, or industrial land could result in emissions of up to nine times that of an acre of agricultural land; and

WHEREAS, the Butte County General Plan establishes Agriculture Element Goal AG-2, directing that the County protect agricultural lands from conversion to non-agricultural uses; and

WHEREAS, according to the Butte County 2016 Crop Report, from 2004 to 2016 Butte County lost 13,635 acres of farmland to urban land, built-up land, and other land uses; and

WHEREAS, this conversion included 4,996 acres of Prime Farmland, 1,678 acres of Unique Farmland, and 6,236 acres of Grazing Land; and

WHEREAS, this information suggests a need to more effectively conserve agricultural lands in order to meet the County's goals; and

WHEREAS, the conservation of grasslands, composting of grazed grasslands, and certain other cultivation practices on rice lands and other agricultural lands in Butte County can also help meet local and statewide goals for GHG emissions reductions, as well as for water conservation and groundwater recharges; and

WHEREAS, the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program is a component of the Strategic Growth Council's Affordable Housing and Sustainability Program (AHSC). The AHSC, administered by the Strategic Growth Council, aims "to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through projects that implement land use, housing, transportation, and agricultural land preservation practices..."; and

WHEREAS, the statewide SALC Program complements investments made in urban areas with the purchase of agricultural conservation easements, development of agricultural land strategy plans, and other mechanisms that result in greenhouse gas reductions and a more resilient agricultural sector; and

WHEREAS, in future years, the statewide SALC Program is proposed to support farm-scale conservation management practices that further promote reductions in GHG emissions and increases in soil carbon sequestration; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Conservation is working in cooperation with the Natural Resources Agency and the SGC to implement the SALC Program. The program invests in agricultural land conservation with revenue from California's California Climate Investments (CCI) Fund, made available for projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions while providing additional benefits to California communities. The CCI is derived from quarterly cap-and-trade auction proceeds, which are administered by the California Air Resources Board; and

WHEREAS, the Butte County Board of Supervisors on March 10, 2015 authorized the Department of Development Services to apply for a SALC Program grant in order to prepare a SALC Strategy; and

WHEREAS, Grant Number 3015-902 was awarded through the Strategic Growth Council to Butte County for preparation of the SALC Strategy on September 22, 2015; and

WHEREAS, upon receiving the grant award, Butte County began a process to update and prepare an agricultural lands base map, an inventory of vulnerable lands, a protected lands inventory, and other mapping products, as well as to identify key sustainable agricultural practices that could help the County meet its greenhouse gas emissions and agricultural lands conservation goals; and

WHEREAS, as part of this project's outreach, the County contacted numerous technical experts, and held stakeholder workshops in April 2016, September 2017, and October 2017; and

WHEREAS, these key partners and stakeholders include the Butte County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the Butte Environmental Council, the Northern California Regional Land Trust, the Butte County Farm Bureau, and the Butte County Department of Water and Resource Conservation; as well as local farmers, ranchers, and other community members; and

WHEREAS, in collaboration with these partner agencies and stakeholders, the following key findings were identified during preparation of the Butte County SALC Strategy:

1. Butte County's rangelands sequester large amounts of carbon, and can sequester significantly more with implementation of carbon sequestration practices such as composting of grazed grasslands. For example, staff estimates that implementation of registry-approved rangeland conservation and composting practices on 75 percent of the County's rangelands could be sufficient to substantially surpass (up to 105% achievement) the total 2020 County-wide carbon emission reduction goal set forth by the Butte County Climate Action Plan. Implementation of these practices on 100 percent of the County's rangelands could result in commensurately higher levels of carbon offsets (up to 140% achievement of total 2020 CAP goals);

2. According to representatives of the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), composting of grazed grasslands in Butte County, particularly its low-soil-productivity, low-water-holding capacity grasslands, could substantially improve the agricultural productivity of these lands;
3. Implementation of other sustainable practices could also substantially support attainment of the County's goals. For example, staff estimates that implementation of reduced winter flooding, straw removal, and dry seeding on 100 percent of the County's rice lands could achieve up to 12 percent of the total 2020 County-wide carbon emission reduction goal as set forth in the Climate Action Plan;
4. The sustainable practices described in the SALC Strategy may not be appropriate for all agricultural operations. Interested landowners and managers are encouraged to evaluate the practices described in the SALC Strategy to determine whether they are feasible and appropriate for their properties;
5. Financial incentive programs are becoming available to support implementation of carbon-offset practices such as the conservation of grasslands, the composting of grazed grasslands, and other sustainable practices;
6. Easily accessible, user-friendly information is lacking about these emerging financial incentive programs for the production of carbon offsets;
7. The Butte County SALC Strategy is a set of tools intended to help connect farmers, ranchers, and others to these emerging financial incentives for implementing sustainable practices, which can direct millions of dollars of cap-and-trade funding to rural communities to help offset carbon emissions; and
8. By so doing, the Butte County SALC Strategy not only supports the agricultural sector, but also supports attainment of the County's goals for GHG emissions reductions and its goals for the conservation of agricultural lands; and

WHEREAS, during preparation of the SALC Strategy, the following considerations were also identified relative to other County plans and programs:

1. Butte County Climate Action Plan (CAP). The CAP analysis does not factor in the benefits of agricultural land in sequestering carbon; rather it only accounts for greenhouse gas emissions. As stated above, carbon sequestration based on conservation and composting of the County's rangelands could provide substantial additional carbon emissions offsets that could help Butte County reach its total net CAP emissions reduction goal and perhaps exceed that goal. The 2019 update to the CAP should include an analysis of carbon sequestration on County agricultural lands, and how it could help the County meet its GHG emissions reductions goals.
2. Land Conservation (Williamson) Act Program. Butte County has expressed interest in considering potential modifications to its Williamson Act program that could more closely align the program with local conditions, needs, and opportunities. Development of the SALC Strategy has provided a number of findings and tools that could be integrated into such a program. For example, given the prominent role that grasslands (rangelands) could play in achieving carbon emissions offsets, the County could consider incentivizing the execution of Williamson Act (or similar agricultural land conservation) contracts for these lands. The program could similarly create additional incentives for other lands whose continuing conservation and appropriate agricultural use could help the County attain its climate action planning or other key sustainability goals;

3. **Agricultural Mitigation Ordinance.** Butte County is preparing an Agricultural Mitigation Ordinance (AMO) in accordance with Butte County General Plan Agriculture Element Action AG-A2.1, to encourage municipalities in Butte County to adopt similar ordinances pursuant to Agriculture Element Action AG-A2.2, and to provide a Draft Agricultural Mitigation Ordinance to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors for future consideration. The AMO would support the General Plan Agricultural Element's stated goal to protect Butte County's agricultural lands from conversion to non-agricultural uses. The County may wish to consider integrating key findings and opportunities from the SALC Strategy into the Draft AMO as it is brought forward;
4. **Oak Woodland Mitigation Ordinance.** Butte County is preparing an oak woodland ordinance which will identify impacts and mitigations for oak woodlands on discretionary projects within the unincorporated area of Butte County. The SALC Strategy may serve to support further development of the ordinance in ways that were not originally foreseen. For example, in the preliminary preparation stage of the ordinance, it was found that the California Oaks Foundation estimates that oak woodlands in Butte County account for over 3.2 million metric tons of sequestered carbon. Carbon sequestration is thought to play an important role in offsetting greenhouse gas emissions. Work toward this ordinance could point to potential carbon sequestration benefits that are not currently being considered for retaining and regrowth of oak woodlands in the review of discretionary projects; and

WHEREAS, the Butte County SALC Strategy is a set of living tools and information intended to assist farmers, ranchers, and other members of the public in voluntarily conserving agricultural lands while achieving the key sustainability goals of carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, water conservation, and groundwater recharge. The SALC Strategy focuses on linking Butte County residents and businesses to millions of dollars in emerging incentives and opportunities for conserving agricultural lands and implementing sustainable practices. Participation in any of the identified programs is entirely voluntary; and

WHEREAS, the Butte County SALC Strategy does not modify or impose any existing or new requirements or regulations of any kind; and

WHEREAS, development and updates to the Butte County SALC Strategy are ongoing, and will continue into the future, in order to better coordinate emerging information, opportunities, planning and programs for agricultural land conservation in Butte County.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Butte County Board of Supervisors hereby accepts the Butte County Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Strategy, based on the following findings:

1. Acceptance of the Butte County Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Strategy was recommended to the Board of Supervisors by the Planning Commission on September 28, 2017.
2. As a set of tools and information which does not create or impose any new regulations, requirements, or programming, and which does not involve the exercise of any discretionary powers over land-use permitting or entitlements, the Butte County Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Strategy is not a 'project' pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 51378, and is therefore not subject to environmental review.
3. As demonstrated in Exhibit A to this resolution, the Butte County Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Strategy is consistent and compatible with the General Plan and any applicable community or specific plan as provided by Government Code Section 65860; as well as long-range planning guidance from the State of California.

4. The proposed SALC Strategy is further compatible with, and supports achievement of the goals of, the Butte County Climate Action Plan.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Butte County Board of Supervisors this 24th day of October, 2017, by the following vote:

AYES: Supervisors Wahl, Kirk, Lambert, Teeter, and Chair Connelly

NOES: None

ABSENT: None

NOT VOTING: None



Bill Connelly, Chair
Butte County Board of Supervisors

ATTEST:

Paul Hahn, Chief Administrative Officer
and Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

By: 
Deputy

Exhibit A

SALC Strategy Consistency with the Butte County General Plan	
General Plan 2030 Goals and Policies	Consistency Review
Land Use Element	
LU-P1.1 The County shall protect and conserve land that is used for agricultural purposes, including cropland and grazing land.	Consistent: The SALC Strategy is intended to protect the broad agricultural land and soil resource base.
LU-P1.3 The County shall minimize potential conflicts between agricultural and urban uses.	Consistent: The SALC Strategy has identified areas where agricultural lands could be converted to nonagricultural use, and minimizes potential conflicts by identifying incentives for agricultural conservation.
Goal LU-11 Effectively coordinate planning efforts with the municipalities.	Consistent: Local municipalities including the cities of Chico, Biggs, Gridley, Oroville, and the Town of Paradise have been consulted during development of the SALC Strategy.
LU-P13.7 Conserve and protect for agricultural use the lands in the Chico area that are situated on the Agricultural Side of the Chico Area Greenline.	Consistent: The SALC Strategy identifies incentives to protect agricultural lands on the agricultural side of the Chico Area Greenline and elsewhere in the County.
Economic Development Element	
LU-P2.6 The County supports programs and projects that would help Butte County farmers provide carbon offsets, if and when new regulations require industries to provide carbon offsets.	Consistent: The SALC Strategy identifies financial incentives for farmers and ranchers to produce carbon offsets. It is important to note that participation in carbon offset production programs is entirely voluntary for offset producers.
LU-P2.7 The County supports programs and projects that utilize agricultural by-products for “green” building material production and/or renewable energy production, such as using straw bales for building or converting rice straw to bio-fuels.	Consistent: A carbon offset protocol for rice production identified in the SALC Strategy supports the baling of rice straw for other uses. In 2019, a facility that processes rice straw into particle board will be completed in Glenn County. This is one potential use for the baled rice straw.
Agriculture Element	
Goal AG-1 Protect, maintain, promote and enhance Butte County’s agriculture uses and resources, a major source of food, employment and income in Butte County.	Consistent: The goal of the SALC Strategy is to conserve agricultural land while promoting key sustainable farming practices.
Goal AG-2 Protect Butte County’s agricultural lands from conversion to non-agricultural uses.	Consistent: The goal of the SALC Strategy is to conserve agricultural land while promoting key sustainable farming practices.

Goal AG-3 Promote innovative and economically viable agriculture.	Consistent: The carbon offset production practices and incentives identified by the SALC Strategy are innovative, and provide additional funding to farmers enrolled in the program(s).
Goal AG-5 Reduce conflicts between urban and agricultural uses and between habitat mitigation banking and agricultural uses.	Consistent: The SALC Strategy identifies areas where agricultural lands could be converted to nonagricultural uses, and reduces this conflict by identifying incentives for agricultural conservation. Habitat mitigation bank locations have been identified, which can help to prevent future conflict between these lands and agricultural lands.
Water Resources Element	
Goal W-1 Maintain and enhance water quality.	Consistent: Achievement of the SALC Strategy goals of conserving water and promoting groundwater recharge can contribute to improved water quality.
Goal W-4 Promote water conservation as an important part of a long-term and sustainable water supply.	Consistent: The Rice Cultivation carbon offset programs identified and promoted by the SALC Strategy include specific practices that conserve water. Other incentives programs promoted by SALC also conserve water.
W-P4.1 Agricultural and urban water use efficiency shall be promoted.	Consistent: Agricultural practices and incentive programs identified and promoted through the SALC Strategy promote efficient water use.
Conservation and Open Space Element	
Goal COS-1 Reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.	Consistent: The SALC Strategy identifies carbon offset practices and incentives that can help achieve this goal.
COS-P1.6 Recognize and promote the emerging market for agricultural producers to provide carbon sequestration services.	Consistent: The SALC Strategy identifies and promotes emerging financial incentives for ranchers to produce carbon sequestration services through rangeland conservation and/or rangeland composting.
Public Facilities and Services Element	
PUB-P11.5 The County supports private and public composting facilities	Consistent: As part of SALC Strategy development, staff is seeking to identify regional composting facilities which produce, or can produce, compost suitable for use in the Grassland Composting protocol.
Area and Neighborhood Plans Element	
D2N-O6.2 Protection of soil resources. (a) To eliminate potential for soil erosion or degradation of its agricultural productivity.	Consistent: The carbon offset programs identified by the SALC Strategy promote soil health, and can reduce soil erosion and degradation while providing financial incentives.
D2N-P6.6 Protect agricultural lands which currently produce, or have the potential to produce, from encroaching urban uses.	Consistent: The SALC Strategy identifies agricultural lands with the potential to be converted to non-agricultural uses, and further identifies and promotes incentives for protecting and conserving these lands.

D2N-P6.7 Identify and protect groundwater recharge areas within and outside of the Planning Area to assure adequate groundwater supplies meeting the standards of the California Safe Drinking Water Act.	Consistent: Development of the SALC Strategy is being coordinated with the Department of Water and Resource Conservation in order to identify groundwater recharge areas in agricultural areas, so that these areas can be considered for prioritized protections.
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SALC Strategy Consistency with the Butte County Climate Action Plan	
Climate Action Plan Measure	Consistency Review
AG1. Implement best practices in rice farming.	Consistent: Practices included in the Rice Cultivation protocols identified and promoted by the SALC Strategy are considered best practices, and help reduce methane emissions.
AG2. Reduce the amount of burned agricultural residue.	Consistent: The Rice Cultivation Protocols identified by the SALC Strategy provide financial incentives for baling rice straw and repurposing it, instead of burning the straw.
AG3. Implement best practices in fertilizer and pesticide use.	Consistent: The Grassland Composting protocol identified and promoted through the SALC Strategy supports best practices that reduce fertilizer and pesticide use.
A2. Prepare for changing precipitation patterns and reduced water supply.	Consistent: Switching to sustainable water conservation and groundwater recharge practices identified through the SALC Strategy can reduce water needs and help prepare for future drought.
R1. Enhance the economic viability of local agriculture in a changing climate.	Consistent: The sustainable farming practices identified and promoted by the SALC Strategy can provide farmers with additional revenue sources.

Strategy Consistency with the State Of California Long-Range Planning Guidelines

2017 General Plan Guidelines	Consistency Review
Land Use Element	
<p>Discouraging premature and unnecessary conversion of open-space land to urban uses is a matter of public interest and will be of benefit to urban dwellers because it will discourage noncontiguous development patterns which unnecessarily increase the costs of community services to community residents (Gov. Code § 65561).</p>	<p>Consistent: The SALC Strategy supports the conservation of agricultural lands and helps to discourage noncontiguous development patterns.</p>
<p>As jurisdictions establish organic material recycling programs, the general plan should consider the infrastructure that is needed to support increased diversion of organics from landfills, including the location of new facilities, the possibility of upgrading existing facilities to accommodate organic material specifically, (i.e., co-locating composting and digestion facilities at existing facilities such as transfer stations, material recovery facilities, and landfills), or the creation of new curbside collection requirements for food scraps with yard waste.</p>	<p>Consistent: In order to support carbon offsets produced by compost additions to rangeland, additional facilities may need to be created to meet the demand for specific qualities of compost, compost storage, and possibly delivery.</p>
Conservation Element	
<p>Highly productive soil resources that support agricultural production and ecosystem services are a finite resource; thus requiring long-term conservation. Soil management and conservation practices, such as cover cropping, crop rotation, mulching, and nutrient management, may help support healthy soils and conservation goals.</p>	<p>Consistent: The SALC Strategy identifies and promotes a number of financial incentive programs supporting these agricultural practices.</p>
Open Space Element	
<p>The inventory must identify open space for natural resources, including, but not limited to: <i>Areas required for the preservation of plant and animal life, including habitat for fish and wildlife species. Such areas may include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas designated in HCPs and NCCPs • Critical habitat identified pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) • Conservation easements • Marine protected areas (MPAs) • Areas identified in greenprints and Regional Conservation 	<p>Consistent: As part of SALC Strategy development, the County has updated its GIS data, including conservation easements and other GIS layers.</p>

<p><i>Assessments (RCAs)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and trails • Areas designated by federal, state, regional and local agencies and governments as important habitat • Existing forest and woodland areas set aside for mitigation • Areas important for habitat connectivity <p><i>Areas required for ecologic and other scientific study purposes. Such areas may include preserves, parks and other land used by universities to study agricultural systems, wildlife habitats, and other natural systems. Rivers, streams, bays and estuaries; riparian areas; and coastal beaches, lakeshores, banks of rivers and streams, and watershed lands.</i></p>	
Climate Change	
<p>CEQA recognizes offsets and sequestration as potential mitigation for GHG emissions. Lead agencies have discretion to choose what is considered feasible and what they are capable of monitoring.</p>	<p>Consistent: The SALC Strategy identifies and promotes carbon offset techniques that have been approved by the California Association of Pollution Control Officers (CAPCOA) as mitigation for air quality impacts.</p>
<p>CAPs should include strategies that address the natural sequestration capabilities within a community, and community-wide efforts that may benefit from project-based funding.</p>	<p>Consistent: The SALC Strategy provides estimates regarding the role of carbon sequestration in potentially achieving the County's overall (net) carbon emissions goals. This information can be incorporated into the updated Climate Action Plan.</p>
<p>The lead agency should find, based on substantial evidence, that any measure, including offsets or sequestration measures, is capable of being accomplished successfully within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, legal, social, and technological factors (CEQA Guidelines § 15364).</p>	<p>Consistent: The SALC Strategy's clarified and coordinated information about carbon sequestration could help to provide evidence to determine whether carbon sequestration measures are capable of being accomplished successfully and within a reasonable period of time.</p>