

# Ag and Food Interprets . . .

- ▶ Protective agricultural zoning on the rise
- ▶ 1956 nitrogen surplus may fade quickly
- ▶ Greater part for chemicals in conservation
- ▶ Agricultural limestone trend continuing downward
- ▶ Food additives pretesting with referee suggested

## Agricultural Zoning

California county provides for establishment of "green belts" . . . statewide study may lead to action in other states

**I**S THE SHRINKING of fertile farm lands, particularly when viewed alongside the nearly 2-million-per-year-increase in U. S. population, reaching serious proportions?

Many think there need not be concern over the increased number of smokestacks in the orchards, or loss of black loam to factory floors and subdivisions. The equivalent production from 2.4 acres of tillable land required to support each person in the U. S. (nearly 5 million acres for the increased population each year) is partially satisfied through greater production from existing farms. Technological advances in farming practices—improved fertilizers and agricultural chemicals the farmer uses—result in more production per acre. Too, new acreages are provided through clearing of timber and brush, draining, and irrigation. And, if the picture became tight, some lands now used for export crops could be directed to domestic production, though this would certainly not help an otherwise hungry world. All these, together with existing surpluses of agricultural products, would indicate a negative answer to the question.

In addition, the President's Material Policy Commission estimated last year that by 1975 there will be an increase of 40% in demand for all farm products as compared with 1950—and the commission indicates that the additional production can be obtained from improved technology on the same acreage of land



In the San Pedro Valley, Calif., good alluvial bottom land is being lost to housing development. Surrounding thousands of acres which are nontillable or which have only limited agricultural value are being left intact

now in use. This too, would suggest no serious problem is developing as a result of loss of farm acreages to spreading urbanization. However, the very important fact is that 1975 will not mark a maximum in population growth curve and greatly increased demands after that time are predicted.

Some see definite limitations to increased production through technological advances and point out that in many of our most productive agricultural states there is little hope of developing a significant amount of new agricultural land. Too, newly cultivated acreages do not always make up for richer land lost to cities, factories, highways, airports, parks, reservoirs, military reservations, and residences—which are taking over agricultural land at an ever-increasing

rate. This group is clamoring for some form of conservation of agricultural land.

Most states have zoning laws. However, none has regulations on a statewide basis against residential and industrial encroachment on land most suited for agriculture. Regulations permit land classed as agricultural land to be used for any other purpose. While there has been some scattered interest over the country in some form of positive protection for agricultural land, little of a concrete nature has resulted except in California.

There are good reasons for California to initiate action. The state is the fastest growing in the nation, 500,000 persons being added to its rolls each year. Too, it has the largest cash income from

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agriculture, which has averaged over \$2.5 billion annually in recent years. There is a conflict between these two factors which set Californians to thinking when they saw thousands of acres of deep black loam in the Santa Clara Valley, which boasts the nation's top production of apricots, prunes, and pears, being lost to industrialization and other withdrawals each year. The same was observed in the wheat, cotton, and citrus and olive orchards of Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys.

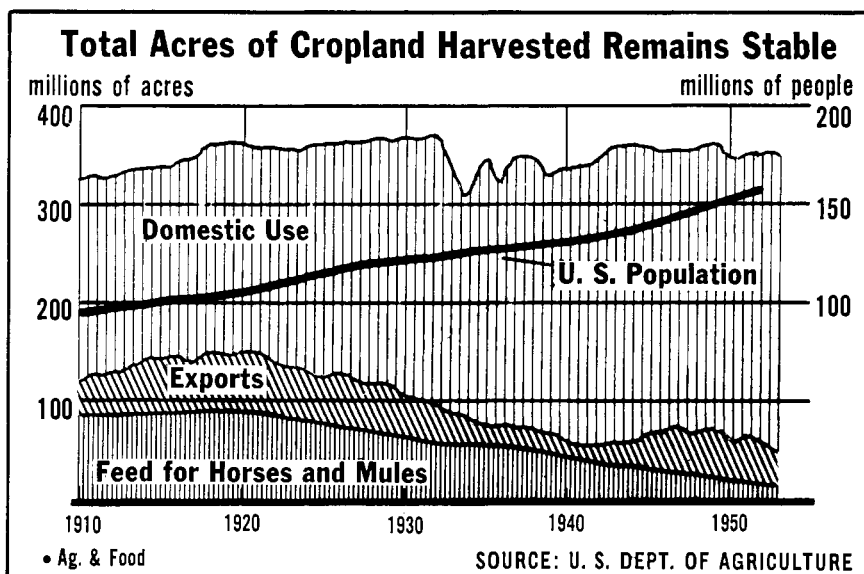
### Santa Clara County Takes First Step

Booming Santa Clara County, historically agricultural, took the first positive step toward conserving its agricultural land. In recent years, the county has seen rapid industrial and residential growth, and farmers became concerned over rapidly disappearing orchards traditionally a source of the county's income. In September 1953 the county passed an amendment to its zoning ordinance which for the first time in the U. S. provided for restricted classification of land called the "Exclusive Agricultural" or "A" zone. Essentially the new zoning provides that land more suitable for agriculture as result of good soil be reserved for agriculture and definitely prohibits industry, commercial development, and housing from encroaching upon it. Land may be zoned for agriculture upon request of owners after study by the county planning commission.

The first "green belt" was established six months later when owners of 744 acres of pear orchards unanimously petitioned the commission to rezone their land for exclusive agricultural use (law permits land to be used from chicken raising to dairying, and from strawberries to orchards). Zoning for this acreage became effective in mid-1954. Since that time, approximately 325 acres in cherry orchards have been rezoned, and several requests for zoning of large areas are pending. These have been placed under emergency ordinance to protect them in the interim.

As may be expected, Santa Clara County is experiencing certain difficulties in carrying out its program. Expansion of cities in the valley is taking place on a very erratic pattern, and urban growth penetrates throughout the rich farm land. When cities annex green belts, they are empowered to allocate the land for urban purposes, and the county is not able to provide protection. In some cases, the price of land has increased to a point where agriculture is not in competition as a prospective user.

Nevertheless, the movement is well conceived and has much support. Santa Clara County officials are proposing a program for the state legislature to inventory agricultural land and to identify the position of agriculture in the state's



basic economic structure. Too, they are attempting to get California to provide the legal implementation which is necessary to immunize selected, critical agricultural areas from encroachment by urban development.

California has about 14 million acres under cultivation. Agricultural zoning with "teeth" for a few hundred acres in a single county may seem insignificant. Such is not the case. The soil and climate of the Santa Clara Valley have given it a reputation of being an unrivaled source of food. Statewide, other agricultural counties are watching closely and considering dynamic zoning programs.

In southern California, for example, the board of directors of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce approved in late January a recommendation of the regional planning commission to protect a heavy agricultural zone in the Little Rock area of Antelope Valley. Alarmed peach and pear growers in this section had requested protection for their orchards, and the planning commission's proposal would permit subdivision into units not smaller than two acres in size and would prohibit city lot subdivision.

A concrete result of increased interest in conserving farm lands is establishment of a statewide agricultural zoning committee by the California Chamber of Commerce in December of last year. The committee, comprising representatives of both agriculture and industry, is still in its infancy but expects to play a definite role in agricultural land conservation. While it is pro-agriculture, it is definitely not against industry and progress. Rather, it realizes that industry depends directly upon the soil and its products and a healthy agricultural economy. What the committee hopes to decide is whether or not farm land can be retired in a more orderly manner than

leap-frog abandonment common today, which in itself leads to additional and unnecessary abandonment as result of increased burden of farm real estate taxation in the fringe areas. Too, the committee hopes to conserve certain areas for permanent production of food and fiber and will propose state legislation to curb unregulated annexation by cities of rich agricultural land.

There are opponents to agricultural zoning in California, as undoubtedly there will be in other areas which likely will consider such legislation. They loudly claim that farmers themselves want to sell residential land for a high price and do not want zoning. They point to current agricultural surpluses and to more efficient production methods farmers can use and claim that agricultural zoning will result in additional local government controls and impede development of vital industries.

Proponents counter with statistics which show that eventual food demands cannot be met unless the rich lands are preserved. In addition they explain that agriculture cannot adjust its location so easily as industry. In addition, agricultural green belts and long range planning will preserve the natural beauty of the countryside, make land available for future urban use, reduce air pollution, enhance flood control and soil conservation, advocates say.

The University of California Agricultural Extension Service, which has devoted considerable time to a study of agricultural zoning, gives other advantages. Many fast growing communities in the state would have found establishment of recreational and school facilities easier had there been zoning plans in operation several years ago. Too, industrial needs of the future may be met more practically if provisions are made to set aside a reservoir of tracts of land for