

Marin County Planning and Agriculture

Background

A wide array of planning policies and regulatory standards apply to establishing and operating farms and ranches in the unincorporated areas of Marin County. Principal among these are the Marin Countywide Plan, the Local Coastal Plans, several Community Plans, and the Zoning Ordinances. The provisions of these various documents are applied by the Planning Division to subdivisions and development applications to achieve the overarching goals of enhancing agricultural production, protecting the environment, and preserving the character of local communities.

Marin Countywide Plan

The Countywide Plan (CWP) serves as the general plan for the unincorporated areas of Marin County, and provides the policy framework for the individual Community Plans and the Zoning Ordinances. The CWP separates Marin into four separate corridors that broadly define the types of land use and development that are typically encouraged in those areas, including the Baylands Corridor, the City-Centered Corridor, the Inland Rural Corridor, and the Coastal Corridor. The Baylands Corridor encompasses the lands along the shoreline of San Francisco, San Pablo, and Richardson Bays, and provides a heightened recognition of the unique environmental characteristics of this area. The City-Centered Corridor, which is located near Highway 101 in the eastern portion of the County, is primarily designated for urban development. The great majority of large agricultural lands are in the Inland Rural Corridor and the Coastal Corridor. The Inland Rural Corridor is located in the northwestern part of the County, and is primarily designated for agriculture and other compatible uses. The Coastal Corridor is adjacent to the Pacific Ocean, and is primarily designated for parkland, agriculture and the preservation of existing small communities.



The CWP contains several elements, including the Natural Systems and Agriculture Element, which contains policies to protect the environment and enhance agricultural production. The Agriculture and Food section of the Natural Systems and Agriculture element establishes thirteen specific policies, with associated implementation programs that promote agriculture in Marin. Several of those policies restrict subdividing agricultural properties and limit non-agricultural development on agricultural land that would be incompatible with the character of the area. Other policies encourage the preservation of productive soils, rangeland forage, sustainable water supplies as well as other natural resources such as the quality of water resources that support mariculture.

Local Coastal Plans

Marin County's Coastal Zone is divided into two areas that are each subject to the policies of a Local Coastal Plan (LCP). LCP Unit 1 encompasses Muir Beach, Stinson Beach, Bolinas, and the surrounding areas. LCP Unit 2 encompasses Point Reyes Station, Inverness, Tomales, Dillon Beach, and the surrounding areas. The LCPs are policy documents that implement the California Coastal Act, and reflect the Act's goals of enhancing shoreline access and tourism, protecting coastal resources, and preserving agricultural areas. LCP policies encourage clustering residential development on agricultural properties to maximize the open land available for agricultural production, and concentrating smaller properties used for a mix of residential development and agricultural production near existing towns and villages in the Coastal Zone.

Zoning and Development Code

Marin County has two separate Zoning Ordinances. The Interim Zoning Ordinance governs the Coastal Zone and the Development Code governs the inland areas of the County. There are various distinctions between the two Zoning Ordinances, but agricultural zoning districts are divided into conventional districts and planned districts in both the Coastal Zone as well as the inland areas of Marin County. Coastal zoning districts are subject to a separate zoning ordinance than the inland areas of Marin County, and there are various distinctions between the two Zoning Ordinances. Development standards in planned districts are more flexible than in conventional zoning districts, but a greater percentage of projects in planned zoning districts require discretionary approval from the Planning Department. In the Coastal Zone, most projects of any magnitude will require a Coastal Permit in addition to any other types of planning applications that may be required. The different agricultural zoning districts are listed in the table below.

INLAND AGRICULTURAL ZONING DISTRICTS

Conventional Zones	Planned Zones
A (Agricultural and Conservation)	ARP (Agricultural, Residential Planned)
A2 (Agriculture, Limited)	

COASTAL AGRICULTURAL ZONING DISTRICTS

Conventional Zones	Planned Zones
C-A (Coastal, Agricultural and Conservation)	C-ARP (Coastal, Agricultural, Residential Planned)
C-R-A (Coastal, Residential, Agricultural)	C-APZ (Coastal, Agricultural Production Zone)

How to Find Out More

Before you purchase agricultural land or plan an agricultural project, we recommend that you do some research regarding the policies and regulations that apply to the property, including the policies in any Community Plan that may affect the project. In order to find out what your property is zoned, visit <http://gisprod1.co.marin.ca.us/CAODist/viewer.htm> and enter either your address or Assessor's tax parcel number. Once you have identified the zoning district that affects the property, visit <http://www.co.marin.ca.us/depts/CD/main/comdev/CURRENT/devCode.cfm> to learn more about the requirements of that zoning district. In addition, you are welcome to contact our Planning Services Counter at (415) 499-6269 to speak with a planner, or visit the Planning Services Counter in Room 308 of the Marin County Civic Center, Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm for more information.

Prepared by Jeremy Tejirian, Marin County Community Development Agency, July 2009.

All information pertinent to Marin County Community Development Agency (MCCDA) regulations has been reviewed and approved by the MCCDA. More information about diversifying your operation is available at the Grown in Marin site under Resources for Farmers, at <http://www.growninmarin.org> or by calling the UCCE Farm Advisor's Office at 415/499-4204.