



**Humboldt County  
Farm Bureau**



**Humboldt Del Norte  
Cattlemen Association**

Commissioner Jeff Smith, Chair  
Humboldt County Planning Commission  
3015 H Street  
Eureka, CA 95501-4484

July 15, 2010

Re: Explanation of Position Opposed to Ranchland (AGR) Classification

Dear Chairman Smith and Commissioners,

At the Planning Commission meeting on July 8, 2010 Chair Smith specifically asked for the rationale as to why we, the Humboldt County Resource Lands Working Group, are opposed to use of the Ranchland (or AGR) classification. Resource Land Working Group Members who own lands to be designated AGR are opposed to this land use designation and instead favor the Agricultural Grazing (AG) as described in the existing Framework Plan

From the original scoping sessions of the GPU update, "Protect our Ag land," has been a common theme. We agree with this sentiment; however we disagree with the means of protection proposed. The difference is philosophical in how protection is achieved. Through the use of regulation, a common planner's tool of raising the minimum parcel size or lowering the density is simply adding an additional burden to historic ranches and timberlands.

The Resource Lands Working Group favors the uses of voluntary and incentive based tools, such as the Williamson Act. The majority of the ranches proposed to be designated AGR are currently under Williamson Contracts and their owners are receiving reduced property taxes in exchange for waiving some of their property rights. The application of AGR would mimic the Williamson Act on lands that are currently contracted and effectively weaken the need for the Act itself while providing no compensation to the landowner for the lost property rights. This increases the burden and pressure on the landowners. Using regulation rather than reward for conservation of open space and agricultural production is philosophically the wrong approach.

The owners of these affected lands have kept them 'whole' through good and bad economic times. By maintaining existing levels of density and current minimum parcel sizes, land owners can capitalize on other

tools such as conservation easements. Obviously, the largest challenges to maintaining these ranches are financial; adding additional land use regulation does not assist land owners in meeting economic challenges.

One of the options available for keeping the lands whole in the past has been borrowing against the land. This option diminishes as a result of decreased land value due to regulation. Additionally, we can foresee an unintended consequences of such a regulation to be larger parcels removed from the “whole” when the landowner needs to use other options such as selling off a piece of land.

It seems as if we are all working to the same end of keeping the working lands of Humboldt County working. Providing incentive based flexibility for landowners to maintain their property is one of the best ways to do that.

As always, we appreciate your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

**Humboldt County Resource Lands Working Group**  
*The Buckeye ~ Humboldt County Farm Bureau*  
*Humboldt Del Norte Cattlemen Association ~ Large Timberland Owners Group*  
*Forest Landowners of California (Humboldt Co. Representatives)*

CC: Planning Commissioners; Bruce Emad; Ralph Faust; Mary Gearheart; Denver Nelson;  
Mel Kreb; Dennis Mayo

Staff: Kirk Girard; Tom Hofweber; Martha Spencer