



FRIENDS OF THE COYOTE VALLEY GREENBELT  
Comments on Conceptual Greenbelt Strategy

FROG submits the following suggestions for strengthening and expanding the document that was presented to the CVSP Task Force on January 9, 2006.

**Vision:** The current language has the effect of downgrading the potential of agriculture by placing the subject in a sentence separate from all the other potential activities and uses which are introduced as the goals of the strategy. We suggest adding small-scale agriculture and related activities into the list in the prior sentence, which would then read:

The goal is to create a high quality environment that includes riparian amenities, trails, natural habitats, beautiful open space surroundings and vistas, connections to the hillsides, small scale agriculture and related activities, and home sites in a rural setting.

**Economic Challenges:** We agree that conventional agriculture is less viable and that many of the challenges will apply to small scale agriculture as well. To address these issues, any agricultural efforts in the Coyote will require programmatic support for such activities as marketing, joint purchasing, water infrastructure, and combined parcel farming, and not just easements and acquisitions.

The responses to these challenges should be dealt with in the Economic Opportunities and Potential section in more detail. For example, small parcels can be combined through a coordinated leasing program into larger, more viable farms. Further, the uncertainty that restricts investment should be reduced over time as an active agricultural program takes hold. High land prices are in part a response to the uncertainty and the hope that the Greenbelt area might somehow be included in the urban area, which also will reduce as the Greenbelt progresses.

It is true that less expensive land can be found further from the city's edge, but there is an increasing national movement to manage urban edge agriculture as an economic advantage for a region. San Jose and Santa Clara County should be leading in this effort.

Either in this section, or perhaps better in a separate section, the document needs to address Economic Challenges with respect to

development, particularly of rural estates with very expensive homes. For example, wealthy homeowners may have no interest in farming the remainder of their land, thus reducing the agricultural/economic potential of the Greenbelt. Introducing high value homes raises land prices, making the purchase of fee title or easements for agricultural lands even more difficult.

**Environmental Challenges:** This section should acknowledge that the introduction of more housing, particularly very expensive homes, in the agricultural area increases the potential for conflict between farming activities (dust, noise, necessary structures, farm vehicles on access roads, etc.) and residents. If separate sections on the challenges and opportunities posed by additional housing development are not added, then this and the following section should acknowledge them. For example, these homes would use septic tanks, and not all parcels will be able to support them. Adding impervious surfaces for large homes, driveways, swimming pools and other amenities reduces the percolation potential of an area already prone to flooding. Bad wells would be a challenge for residents as well as for irrigation. Again, the corresponding Opportunities section should address the responses.

**Economic Opportunities and Potential:** Agricultural areas are often beautiful, but they can also include large structures like growing sheds and greenhouses that many would not consider aesthetic. This point needs to be raised in the Challenges section as a counterpoint to the first item of this section.

**Environmental Opportunities:** We agree with this section.

**Assumptions and Principles:** Item 4 of this section should be modified to read: While property owners may choose to engage in farming, there is no intention to force agriculture uses. Instead, agricultural uses are to be encouraged and facilitated, not required.

**Draft Strategy Elements (Introductory paragraph):** Stating that the primary purpose of agriculture in the South Coyote Valley is to enhance the value of rural residential home sites is an unnecessary downgrading of the value of agriculture for its own sake ñ for its value in producing crops of real value, for its ability to retain something of the area's heritage, for its demonstration to urban dwellers of what it means to grow food. Agriculture is more than aesthetics, and the current language is unnecessarily demeaning.

Financing: Item 1 ñ It is inappropriate to identify seed money as a source for ongoing operational funding. By definition seed money is to initiate efforts, and it generally implies a level of funding lower than a serious effort to create a Greenbelt will require. That said, clearly the effort will start with seed money. Item 3 should include the Santa Clara County Parks Fund, or it should be identified as one of the existing tax-supported entities in Item 4.

Resources: SAGE should be identified as a resource, particularly for expertise in small-scale sustainable agriculture. The Trust for Public Land should be added in the Land Trusts category.

#### Final Comments:

This document, if amended, will provide substantial guidance for the EIR and serve as a starting point for the more detailed work that implementation of the Greenbelt will require in ensuing years. Both the initial research by SAGE and the contributions of the planning staff and consultants have provided a strong beginning for this important effort.