Appendix D. South Coyote Valley Greenbelt Agricultural Park
A Potential Land Use Concept

At the same time that SAGE was retained by the City of San Jose to produce the Coyote Valley Greenbelt Research Report, SAGE was leading an *Urban Edge Agricultural Parks Feasibility Study*. This Study, taking place in two phases over two years (2004 - 2005), is funded by the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) Community Outreach and Assistance Partnership Program.

There is an overlap in the purpose of the Greenbelt Research and the purpose of the Agricultural Parks Feasibility Study. Therefore, it was decided to include in this Research Report, a potential land use concept for a Coyote Valley Greenbelt Agricultural Park.

The Urban Edge Agricultural Parks Feasibility Study, Final Report Phase I, is available at www.sagecenter.org. A synopsis of the Executive Summary of this Report is included below in order to establish the background and rationale for the AgParks concept as it might apply to the Greenbelt. The potential land use concept for a Coyote Valley Greenbelt Agricultural Park follows this synopsis.

Urban Edge Agricultural Parks Feasibility Study
Final Report Phase I - Synopsis of the Executive Summary

Overview of AgPark Concept

California's producers of specialty crops, particularly those with limited resources, face the twin challenges of access to affordable land and profitability. At the same time, residents in urban areas such as the San Francisco Bay Area seek to contain sprawl, improve diet and health, and preserve treasured natural landscapes. As these rural and urban problems interact, they may yield some innovative solutions.

The AgriCultural Connection Project[25] fosters the shared values of sense of place, culture, and health as means to promote the convergent interests of specialty crop producers seeking a viable living and diverse urban consumers seeking a healthy life. The Project is developing strategies that link solutions to the market- and land-access needs of many producers, with solutions to the diet-related health problems and sprawl-containment needs of metropolitan regions.

The creation of Urban Edge Agricultural Parks is one such potential strategy. Agricultural Parks are a new idea, but the concept draws from various existing models. Such Parks are envisioned as entities that would facilitate secured land tenancy by multiple small producers and that would also provide fresh food and an educational, environmental, and aesthetic amenity for nearby communities. The naming of the concept as a "park" is intended to suggest the continued open space preservation, while at

[25] This Project covers a number of related SAGE program areas.

the same time invoking the traditional model of a business park, with multiple tenancies operating under a common ownership structure.

Phase I Study Goal

This Phase I Feasibility Study explores the challenges and opportunities of developing Urban Edge Agricultural Parks on two different sites with varying conditions of ownership, agricultural potential, and relationships to urbanized development. The Phase I Feasibility Study's goal is to demonstrate how such Parks will achieve the objectives of land access for limited-resource specialty crop producers while concurrently creating economic, social, and environmental value at the urban edge through activation of the land in productive uses.

Study Methodology and Findings

The study methodology included the following: background research into the historical context for collective farming; research of management and development models; exploration of funding resources; identification of producer's and access needs; identification and screening of potential sites; and preliminary program planning for two selected sites. These sites were Martial Cottle Park located in San Jose and under the jurisdiction of the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department; and Ardenwood Historic Farm located in Fremont and under the jurisdiction of the East Bay Regional Park District.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Next Steps

The research and analysis for this Phase I report outlines the following key opportunities and challenges:

Opportunities:

- Land owned by public agencies offers the most near-term opportunities, and public agencies have been most immediately responsive to the AgPark concept. Additional potential sites owned by farmland trusts and preserves, or in private ownership, bear further investigation.
- Many of the opportunity sites emerged from planning processes for public/open spaces. In some cases, non-traditional spaces are being re-evaluated for agricultural potential: rights-of-way, firebreaks, combined agriculture/recreation areas, and for other purposes.
- In response to increased urban sprawl, growing support for non-urban buffers and agricultural preservation in the Bay Area has included mandates for agriculture/green space in some development projects.
- In keeping with trends toward innovative small-scale agriculture and niche marketing, the AgPark model is of interest to those seeking to develop effective collaborative agricultural enterprise and sub-leasing programs.
- Urban edge locations are particularly valued by emerging local-food systems connections.

Challenges:

- The high value of urban edge land in the Bay Area can make costs prohibitive to agriculture.
- Development pressures and local politics create a climate with a low prioritization of agricultural land use.
- Water and resource allotment is a challenge in the Bay Area as with everywhere in California.

Next Steps

Recommendations for next steps in Phase II included the following: organization of focus groups to test needs of potential AgPark producers (and link them with circumstances of specific potential AgPark sites); production of economic analysis of small-scale farming at the urban edge; development of more detailed program, management, and operations plans for the two sites studied to date; and production of new preliminary feasibility studies for additional sites as determined by interest and funding availability. [*End of Executive Summary Synopsis*.]

South Coyote Valley Greenbelt Agricultural Park - A Potential Land Use Concept

South Coyote Valley is located in the south San Francisco Bay Area between the Cities of San Jose and Morgan Hill. The South Coyote Valley Greenbelt encompasses approximately 3,600 acres of unincorporated land in the southern part of the Valley. Santa Clara County, and the Cities of San Jose and Morgan Hill designated the Greenbelt in their General Plans to serve as a permanent non-urban buffer between the two cities. Potential uses allowed in the Greenbelt include agriculture, recreation, and rural residential development.

San Jose is currently developing a Specific Plan for the northern half of the Valley to accommodate a development program of 50,000 jobs and 25,000 new residents. The Greenbelt is included in the Specific Plan process so that strategies can be formulated to secure it as a permanent greenbelt.

An Urban Edge Agricultural Park that emphasizes small-scale agriculture providing fresh food as well as educational and recreational services to a nearby urban community has great potential as an element in the Greenbelt. In this report, the Coyote Valley Greenbelt Agricultural Park is conceptualized in a general way on two different hypothetical sites, to demonstrate its potential and possibilities in this urban edge setting. It has not been reviewed by the CVSP Task Force, and is therefore not an integral part of the specific plan document. Once the Specific Plan is completed, it is likely that there will be an opportunity for interested stakeholders to assess the AgParks concept for one or more specific sites within the Greenbelt.

Context

Regional Location

Coyote Valley is located in Santa Clara County at the southern tip of the urbanized portion of the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. It is also at the southern edge of the economic region known as Silicon Valley. Located approximately 13 miles south of downtown San José and 7 miles north of downtown Morgan Hill, Coyote Valley is connected to the region by Highway 101, which forms the area's eastern boundary, and by Monterey Highway and Santa Teresa Boulevard, which extend through the Valley.

Character of the Coyote Valley Today

Coyote Valley is roughly 6 miles long and 2 miles wide. It runs northwest by southeast and is defined by the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west and the foothills of the Diablo Range to the east. Tulare Hill, Coyote Peak, and the hills of the Laguna Seca formation enclose the north end of the Valley, creating a clear physical break between the urban fabric of San José and rural Coyote Valley. The 7,000-acre planning area generally occupies the flat valley floor formed by these foothills. Coyote Creek and its tributary, Fisher Creek, are the key natural features on the Valley floor, with the riparian vegetation along Coyote Creek providing a pleasing contrast to the grasslands that make up most of the Valley.

Coyote Valley is currently predominantly rural in character, despite its proximity to Silicon Valley and San Jose, the region's largest city. The Valley currently consists primarily of open space and agricultural lands, with scattered rural residential and agriculture-related development, particularly in the southern half of the Valley. Other existing uses in the Valley include IBM's Santa Teresa campus, the PG&E electrical substation, the new Metcalf Energy Center, the Riverside Golf Course, the County's 800+-acre Coyote Creek Parkway, and a handful of commercial and industrial uses along Monterey Highway, including the unincorporated town of Coyote, with its bar, post office, lumber yard, Grange Hall, and bait shops.

Planned Development

San Jose is currently developing a Specific Plan for the northern half of the Valley to accommodate a development program of 50,000 jobs and 25,000 residents. Within the next two decades, as the Specific Plan is implemented, the northern half of the Valley will become a vibrant urban place. It will have a mixed-use, high-density urban core designed around a new 60-acre lake and surrounded by transit-oriented neighborhoods. Trail systems and greenways will provide recreational and environmental connectivity to regional parklands to the east and west and to the Greenbelt to the south.

Coyote Valley Greenbelt: Vision and Challenges

In 2000, the City, County, and other stakeholders developed Greenbelt Planning Principles with the following Coyote Valley Greenbelt Vision statement to guide the establishment of the Greenbelt as the northern part of the Valley was developed. The Vision Statement describes the Valley as:

The Coyote Valley Greenbelt should be a unique, rural place of countywide importance, providing permanent separation between the urban areas of the North County and the South County. It should be a special place that:

- *Clearly delineates a permanent, non-urban buffer between the urban areas of North County and South County*
- *Supports and celebrates small scale agriculture and Santa Clara County's agricultural heritage*
- *Provides recreational opportunities for residents throughout the county*
- *Contributes to the quality of life of nearby urban neighborhoods.*
- *Protects, enhances, and teaches the ecological values of its riparian areas*
- *Provides safe, convenient recreational linkages to and between the trails and open space lands of the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range, as well as to the urban areas to its north and south*
- *Provides a positive, memorable experience for those who visit or pass through it*
- *Maintains its rural character*
- *Can be a source of pride for current and future residents of Santa Clara County*
- *Is enhanced by the natural appearance of its adjacent foothills*

Existing conditions show a reality quite different from this vision. The Greenbelt encompasses almost 400 parcels of land with an average size of less than 10 acres. Agriculture is the predominant land use in terms of acreage, but most fields are fallow and dozens of commercial greenhouses are empty or derelict. Rural residential, the second largest land use, is trending toward new construction of large rural ranchette homes, although there are still many modest older houses, especially on the 1 to 5 acre parcels along streets where subdivisions started before the 1984 Greenbelt designation. Mixed into the landscape are several large light industrial uses including a lumberyard and a prefabricated concrete business, and several large commercial agricultural enterprises including a sod farm and mushroom farm. The overall character is far from most conceptions of a greenbelt. Skeptics state that increased traffic and pollution from the pending development will make the concept of a Greenbelt even more far-fetched.

One major challenge to the implementation of the Greenbelt vision is a financial one. The experience of greenbelt property owners, many of whom are current or retired farmers, is that agriculture is no longer viable. They cite lack of profitability, labor, small parcel size, urban adjacencies, and over-regulation as key problems. Many of these stakeholders are primarily interested in the financial outcome. Some believe that their land values should be similar to values in the northern part of the valley. Others are counting on their land as their retirement plan.

However, there is another set of stakeholders, including environmental and open space groups, aspiring farmers, and local food enthusiasts, who believe that small-scale specialty crop agriculture could be a feasible land use in the Greenbelt. One concept is for a food belt, envisioned as a multi-functional interweaving of agricultural, environmental, recreational, and residential land uses that would complement the mixed-use theme of the planned development. The agricultural element could encompass

multiple specialty crop and small animal operations that emphasize on-farm sales and education as well as direct sales to local consumers and institutions. The food belt concept is generating interest, and also many questions about feasibility in term of economics, demand from new farmers, proximity to a dense urban area, and adjacency of executive homes and farms. In many respects, the Agricultural Parks concept is a microcosm of the food belt concept.

Almost all stakeholders agree that key to the success of the Greenbelt is a holistic plan that links market opportunities (both real estate and agricultural enterprise) with strategic public investment.

AgPark Concept- General Considerations

Site selection

No particular site has been selected for an agricultural park in the Coyote Valley Greenbelt. The program elements in the following section illustrate a hypothetical mix of AgPark activities as well as potential planning solutions to the particular complexities typical of the Greenbelt. These complexities include working around existing residences and other existing land uses, the incorporation of existing roadways, and linkages to existing parklands.

Soil quality and composition will determine the varied value and viability of agricultural land in the greenbelt. Particularly for organic and intensive agriculture, previous use (or disuse) by conventional farms and greenhouses indicates the possibility of very different necessary input by new farmers. It is suggested that guaranteed long-term access to the land would allow farmers the security to transition to organic and intensive agricultural practices.

The relatively high water table in Coyote Valley allows for easy access via wells. Most parcels have existing wells although many of these need retrofitting. The expectation is that there will be sufficient water for the urban area and for expanded agricultural uses.

Existing Land Uses

Current land use/state of development is one of the larger issues facing the Coyote Valley planning process. In order to be feasible, the AgParks concept needs to demonstrate the flexibility of encompassing two or three undeveloped parcels of land or of falling over a larger number of smaller plots, interspersed with already developed sites.

Connections to Adjacent Park Land

On both the eastern and western edges of the Coyote Valley Agricultural Greenbelt are regional parklands that can be accessed via sites along the edge. Connections with these should be a primary consideration in the site planning of an agricultural park.

Land Rehabilitation

An agricultural suitability analysis of the lots would determine much of a park's site plan. Much of the Greenbelt is underutilized and some lots are currently in industrial use.

Fallow land, neglected orchards, abandoned greenhouses and other land not currently in agricultural use may need extensive site mitigation before being put into agricultural production. It may be best to use the least suitable lots for non-agricultural program elements.

Circulation

The report does not propose extensive recreational trails or park space. Rather, it proposes establishing a combined recreational trail and farm service network. The historic intensity of agricultural uses limits existing "natural" areas, while the adjacent regional parklands, such as the Coyote Creek Parkway, offer extensive recreational trail networks. Therefore, this study recommends creating linkages to regional parklands, rather than developing additional amenities on-site. Furthermore, the existing road network would most likely bisect an agricultural park in the Coyote Valley Greenbelt. For safety and circulation reasons, this report recommends keeping recreational trail users and farmers off main thoroughfare roads by providing a separate circulation network. Existing and new hedgerows and buffer strips between plots are opportunities for additional multi-use recreational trails.

Economic Viability and Funding

Finally, in this initial phase, the challenging issue of current land values is not addressed. Subsidies, land trusts, and incentives to keep the land in agricultural production will probably be a necessary component of the Greenbelt strategic plan, regardless of whether or not it becomes an AgPark.

Management

The project obviously could not develop a management plan or draft a pro forma for a Coyote Valley Greenbelt AgPark without studying a specific site. However, the Greenbelt Research to date and antecedent research both point to the need for a dedicated entity to help pro-actively develop, oversee, and market the agricultural element of the Greenbelt, in order to help ensure its success. This will be particularly necessary in so far as a more comprehensive Food Belt concept is implemented.

AgPark Concept- Potential Program Elements

The overall AgPark concept is envisioned as encompassing about a hundred to several hundred acres. To accommodate this range, the following potential elements are also described in a range of scales.

Agricultural Operations

- Farm Plots: could include multiple small lots (~3-7.5 ac), medium lots (~8-15 ac), and large lots (~16-40 ac). The small lots could best accommodate intensive row-cropping of specialty vegetables, herbs, and flowers; and small nursery businesses. The medium lots could accommodate more mixed cropping systems, small fruits such as can berries, and also small-scale animal and dairy operations. The larger lots could

accommodate orchards (including existing orchards) and tree farms in addition to the other uses.

- Greenhouse: existing greenhouses could be incorporated into the AgPark, operated by a single producer and/or used as a shared propagation facility and/or for crop research. There is potential to heat the greenhouse from local compost byproduct.
- Animal Husbandry: There is an opportunity to establish small-scale commercial animal husbandry operations, such as pastured poultry. In bio-intensive farms, animal operations are often rotated with other cropping systems for fertility and disease and weed control. A 4-H or other institutional research facility is proposed. This could include barns and corrals, but there is no grazing land per se. An appropriately scaled recreational equestrian center could also be incorporated.
- Farm Equipment Storage: an acre or less could be dedicated to shared farm equipment storage and a shared machine shop.
- Farm Service Routes: such circulation through and/or around the AgPark could potentially be combined with or created parallel to mixed-use recreational trails.

Educational Facilities

Educational programming is a core element of the AgPark operation, in terms of public relations, income diversification, and basic philosophy to cultivate public access. There are numerous examples of educational farms to draw from, both those for which education is the primary activity and those which offer educational programming as an adjunct to a farming business. A sampling of the kinds of activities offered include the following:

<u>Passive or minimally staffed:</u>

- Interpretive signage
- Demonstration gardens
- Petting zoo
- Equipment and artifact museum

<u>Staffed</u>

- Field days for schools, public, and private groups
- Summer camps for children
- 'Week at the farm' programs for school groups
- Customized 'ag-tainment' activities for private groups and businesses
- On-farm research projects conducted in conjunction with an educational institution

Recreational Facilities

- Trails: recreational trails would be a major feature of the AgPark. Obviously, these would need to be well managed for purposes of liability and maintenance, requiring at the least, creation of appropriate buffers and establishment of interpretive signage.
- Horseback riding: this has been identified as an important desired use. Riding trails through the Greenbelt would provide a connection between riding trails in the Coyote Creek Parkway and in regional parks to the west, and thus significantly expand the

overall equestrian capacity of the south county. An equestrian facility could be part of a diversified AgPark operation in terms of both income and sustainable management, provided it did not fall into the large group assembly restriction.

Commercial/Concessions and Public Access

- Market/Produce stand: such an onsite facility would be important for attracting on-farm business. Ideally it would have a certified kitchen for preparing value-added products and possibly for serving some of these products on-site in a 'market café'. Such a facility could be developed in conjunction with the packing and shipping infrastructure needed for the AgPark products.
- Historic house, if there was one, or a new facility could incorporate a small bed and breakfast operation and/or restaurant.
- Outdoor Event Space, Lawn, Gazebo: Associated with market stand, bed and breakfast operation or visitor center; available for private events.
- Entry Feature/Main Entry Road: for the purposes of identity and visibility, it would be desirable to develop a notable entry to the park, with landscape features and signage.
- Parking: there would need to be sufficient public parking to support the proposed uses. Potentially, this parking area could be paved with permeable materials.

Housing

Ideally, there would be on-site housing for the families farming the AgPark. This need could be accommodated by siting the AgPark over properties that either already have houses or have permits for homesites. In addition, current regulations allow for many current homesites to build one or more extra 'granny' units. Any new homesites constructed could be relatively modest and designed and sited as part of the overall AgPark plan.

Conclusions

The Coyote Valley Greenbelt as a whole has enormous potential to provide an active urban buffer, with a mix of viable economic uses such as agriculture and visitor-serving and recreation activities, while at the same time providing resource protection and a visual and physical amenity to more urban development to the north and south. Local municipalities have a vested interest in developing and implementing a feasible plan to realize the Greenbelt vision. San Jose wants to help create a vibrant Greenbelt as an integral part of the Coyote Valley Specific Plan. Santa Clara County wants to set a positive precedent for Greenbelts and Urban Growth Boundaries elsewhere in the County.

A Coyote Valley Agricultural Park is a concept that in many ways epitomizes the Greenbelt vision of supporting small scale agriculture, providing recreational linkages to surrounding regional park areas, and contributing to the quality of life of nearby urban neighborhoods.