

CONVERSION OR RETENTION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND?

A MARION COUNTY, OREGON EXAMPLE

by

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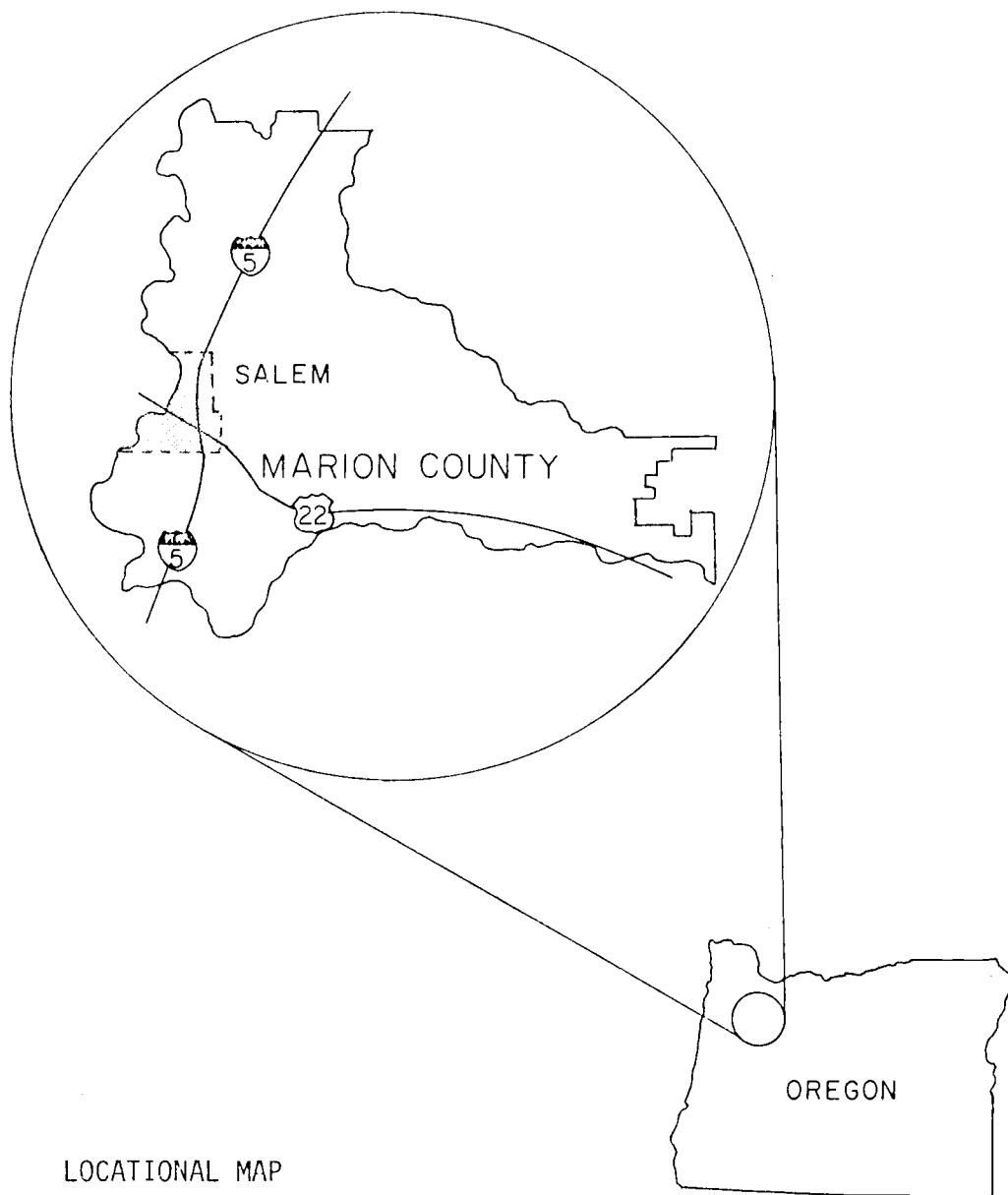
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LOCATIONAL MAP

## CONVERSION OR RETENTION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND?

### A MARION COUNTY, OREGON EXAMPLE

ABSTRACT: Marion County had a 1976 cash receipt from all farm products amounting to \$110,429,000. Much of this farm value was produced on the county's 410,350 acres of class I through IV soils. These soils, regardless of productivity, also have potential for a variety of other non-farm uses. It is this conflict (farm versus non-farm) that has led to the development of governmental policies concerning the use of agricultural land in Marion County. Resulting policies include both rural development standards in addition to urban growth delineations. Farm zoning combined with rural development policies have drastically changed the treatment of rural subdivisions (defined as the division of land into four or more lots within a single year) since 1970.

## INTRODUCTION

Our Nation's agricultural lands have received considerable attention over the last several decades. This attention has generated numerous local, state and national discussions and studies aimed at shedding some light on agricultural production in relation to demands.

One particular study<sup>1</sup> suggests that sufficient cropland is now available, or will be, to meet food and fiber needs for the immediate future. Another<sup>2</sup> indicates that with the recent developments in world food demands, possible reductions (or at least a leveling off) in fertilizer availability, stabilization of agricultural technology, depletion of ground water resources (in certain parts of the country), conversion of marginal land into the crop production cycle, and the loss of land used for specialty crops, overall cropland needs may be in excess of what now or may soon be available.

Dr. Larry Boersma, professor of soil science at Oregon State University, stated in a recent publication entitled The World Food Crisis that ". . .the world will suffer extensive starvation before the end of this century. This will occur because population growth cannot be controlled and two of the most essential inputs for food production, namely land and water, are in short supply." He further states ". . . land suitable for crop production is decreasing because of the occupation of agricultural land by non-agricultural uses. Among these are highways, shopping centers, and housing developments."

In a publication<sup>3</sup> released in 1975, diverse opinions were expressed concerning the adequacy of farmland for food demands.

Milton Patton, Associate Director for State Services (Council of State Governments) suggests in this aforementioned publication that " . . . macro treatment of acres of cropland obscures substantial real-life questions of changes in land use for food and fiber output as related to public purposes." This may be particularly true for Oregon and more specifically, Marion County, the governmental unit explored in this paper.

Dr. William Wood, author of the newsletter "Economic and Social Issues" (University of California, Riverside) raises an interesting question. One that may be the heart of the agricultural land use planning issue. He states: "The ultimate economic and social issue may be: Is food an inalienable right (to be guaranteed politically), or is it simply another good or service that will be allocated through the economic and social system?"

Dr. Wood's question relates more to the macro situation concerning agricultural land and its retention or conversion. However, this paper will be concerned with the micro-level, that being the county.

A central problem facing Marion County is simply, should agricultural land be retained or converted to non-agricultural uses. This research paper will not attempt to answer this question in total, but will investigate pertinent issues surrounding this problem, analyze local attempts to control the retention/conversion process, and trace the development of local policies concerning the use of rural land in the county.

Rural subdivision activities will be the focal point of the research conducted for this paper. It was selected because of its volume over the last decade. The research involved an historical look



at rural subdivision activity. Documents from the local planning department were used in developing the following points:

1. Locating subject subdivisions.
2. Determining size of subdivisions (lots and acreage).
3. Documenting the year a subdivision was approved or disapproved.

The various locations were then compared to a county soils map. Acreages were classified as to soil capability which in turn assisted in determining the relative agricultural potential of those lands converted to rural subdivisions. Numerous planning commission meetings were observed over a three year period which assisted in developing a perspective of policy formulations of the local decision makers.

Although Marion County is consistently one of the top agricultural producing areas in the United States, it accounts for a fraction of the total U.S. food supply. Nonetheless, retention or conversion of agricultural land is an important policy issue to county citizens as well as Oregonians.

## BACKGROUND

### Geographic Description

Marion County is located in northwest Oregon, in the central section of the Willamette River Basin.<sup>4</sup> The Willamette Basin extends over 12,145 square miles between the crests of the Cascade Ranges and is drained by the Willamette and Sandy Rivers. The basin is generally rectangular in shape, being 150 miles long and 75 miles wide. The Cascade Mountain Range forms the eastern boundary, Coast Range the

western, Calapooya Mountains the southern, and the Columbia River the northern.

Marion County lies slightly north of the approximate geographic center of the Willamette Basin. It has a total area of 746,240 acres. Major urban centers within the immediate area include Portland, 40 miles to the north; Salem, located in the western portion of the county; Eugene some 60 miles to the south.

Each of these urban areas have been designated as Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas by the Census of Population and are the major growth centers in the State of Oregon.

#### General Soils Description

Soils play a major role in defining an "agriculturally productive area." Soil characteristics are important in determining the type of crops grown, crop rotation cycle, amount of fertilizer required, tilling methods, and many other factors. Soil classifications, according to capability classes, are also used by planning agencies in developing policies concerning the retention or conversion of rural lands (this will be more fully explored later in this paper). It is therefore important to have a basic understanding of the types of soils within the study area.

Marion County contains 23 soil associations and 89 individual soil categories.<sup>5</sup> Each soil has different properties resulting primarily from the variables connected with its formation. A difference in properties result in differences in use, suitability and management needs, problems and potentials.

The Soil Conservation Service has characterized four basic

landform--general soils for Marion County. They include:

1. Alluvial Bottomlands
2. Alluvial Terraces
3. Low Foothills
4. Cascade Mountain Foothills

#### Soil Suitability For Agriculture

Each of the 89 soil classifications have been associated with particular land capability class. In general, the lower the class number (I - VIII) the more suitable the soil is for agriculture. The risk for soil damage or limitation in use becomes progressively greater from Class I to Class VIII. Within each class, sub-groups are established according to the major causes of limitation; these include: (e) for erosion hazard because of slope or textural quality, (w) for wetness because of drainage conditions or overflow, and (s) for root zone limitations because of soil qualities.

The following quote contained in the Marion County Soil Survey further explains capability classifications:

"Class I soils have few limitations that restrict their use. Class II soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices. Class III soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require special conservation practices, or both. Class IV soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require very careful management, or

both. Class V soils are not likely to erode but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that limit their use largely to pasture, range, woodland, or wildlife. Class VI soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuited to cultivation and limit their use largely to pasture or range, woodland, or wildlife. Class VII soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuited to cultivation and that restrict their use largely to pasture or range, woodland or wildlife. Class VIII soils and landforms have limitations that preclude their use for commercial plants and restrict their use to recreation, wildlife, or water supply, or to aesthetic purposes."

As is noted from the preceding quote, soil capability responds to, in part, the inherent value of the soil to produce a crop or crops. Closely connected with this are such factors as: artificial drainage, chemical application, irrigation, operational equipment, etc. Other production capabilities include indirect items such as location of processing plants, methods of transportation, nature of available technology, the age of the farmer, and surrounding land uses.

The soil survey for the county shows that of the 546,908 acres classified in the eight capability categories, 410,353 acres are in the first four classes. More specifically, 16,520 acres in Class I, 206,586 acres in Class II, 139,192 acres in Class III, and 48,055 in Class IV. The remaining 136,556 acres are in Classes V through VIII.

In other words, 75 percent of the acres surveyed are in Classes I - IV soils, or those soils considered most productive agriculturally.

It follows, then, that many of the rural developments, regardless of location, may run the risk of converting relatively good agricultural land into non-agricultural uses.

A map later in this paper demonstrates the tendency for rural developments to concentrate around existing urban centers. These same urban centers were initially settled in excellent farming areas and thus exist on those same soils considered best for agricultural production.

Given this type of land use pattern, urban and rural land use policies will necessarily influence future land use mixes within Marion County's land use base.

#### IS THERE A NEED TO RETAIN AGRICULTURAL LAND?

The question concerning the protection of agricultural land officially surfaced in the 1969 Oregon Legislative Session. During that session, the legislature enacted Senate Bill 10 which provided a stimulus for comprehensive planning in Oregon. This was followed by Senate Bill 100 in the 1973 legislative session. Among numerous other issues, the bill spoke to the preservation of agricultural land.

Two specific items were of particular importance in Senate Bill 100. The first being the formation of urban growth boundaries. The other, identification and preservation of Class I through IV soils (in western Oregon) for agricultural production. These two concepts tended to strengthen the argument that retention of agricultural land in Oregon was important.

### Local Mandates

Prior to enactment of Senate Bill 100 and its provisions, Marion County and the City of Salem were discussing, and eventually adopting an urban growth boundary.<sup>6</sup> In establishing a need for such strategy, the following was mentioned: "The problems 'sprawl' poses to this area are particularly significant because of the importance of agriculture to the local economy. Choice farmland is lost when urban developers outbid farmers for the land. Agricultural interests have expressed deep concerns about the way prime farmlands are being permanently removed from agricultural production."

Marion County had also enacted local zoning classifications prior to the passage of Senate Bill 100. The zones were interim in nature because the county lacked an adopted comprehensive plan. Numerous farm zones existed with the Exclusive Farm Use Zone being the most limited in terms of development alternatives.

### Economic Importance of Farming Community

While shaping policies that would ultimately be contained in the comprehensive plan, economic conditions of Marion County farming activities were studied in some detail. One study<sup>7</sup> in particular, developed four alternatives in relation to use of agricultural land and the resulting economic consequences of those alternative uses.

Initial county workshops conducted in the spring of 1970 developed several statements concerning agricultural operations in Marion County. These statements, although tentative in nature, expressed the desire of retaining the competitive advantage of the agricultural industry

within the county.<sup>8</sup>

- "1. The agricultural industry should remain strong. Emphasis should be put on capturing the maximum feasible share of agricultural markets.
2. Land on commercial farms should be taxed at agricultural value.
3. A balance between growth of the local economy and air and water quality should remain within reasonable limits.
4. Local governments should provide services such as sewer, water, and convenient transportation systems to help maintain a healthy food processing industry. Rates for these services should be competitive with those in other areas. The community should cooperate in helping to accommodate an adequate labor force.
5. Fragmentation of commercial farmlands should be discouraged in order to enhance efficient competitive commercial farming practices.
6. Maximum governmental cooperation should be aimed at developing upstream water resources for multi-purpose uses (recreation, irrigation, etc.).
7. Prime agricultural land should be preserved for agricultural use to maximum extent possible.

8. Prime timber producing areas, i.e., large timber management tracts both private and public, should be given the same priority for preservation as prime agricultural land.
9. Flood plains should be held for agriculture or other compatible uses, such as recreation.
10. Scatteration patterns of urbanization should be discouraged.
11. Dwellings at extremely low densities should be permitted in rural areas on unproductive soils.
12. Farmlands should provide open space for scenery to enhance environmental livability and the tourist industry. Strip-type commercial or residential development along roads in these areas should be discouraged.
13. Non-agricultural uses of land in prime agricultural areas should be limited to those uses which can easily be reverted back to agriculture, such as golf courses, parks, hunting facilities, trail systems, etc."

That same publication further says:<sup>9</sup>

"Two ideas seem to permeate the list of attitudes on rural land use:

- a. that agriculture should continue to grow,



remaining a strong leader in the county economy.

- b. that all uses of land need to emphasize compatibility with over-all environmental enhancement."

Many of the above statements became official goals of the Marion County comprehensive plan (adopted in 1972).<sup>10</sup>

### Agricultural Economy Examined

Cash receipts of all farm products provides a bench mark of actual dollars received by the farming community within a particular year. This dollar amount does not reflect other segments of the agricultural community such as processing of raw products, machinery purchased, resulting employment, etc.

When considering the "multiplier concept" the value of the following cash receipt becomes more realistic in terms of total economic impact. It was estimated in Agricultural Land Use Decisions For Marion County, that the business multiplier<sup>11</sup> for agriculture was between \$1.50 and \$1.80. In general terms, these figures indicate that each dollar of revenue produces an additional 50 to 80 cents worth of business activity in the local economy.

The county's local economy also is stimulated by the agricultural processing industry. In a recent newspaper article, the Northwest Food Processors Association indicated that gross sales (1975) amounted to \$385,000,000 for the state of Oregon. A significant portion of this dollar amount can be directly linked to Marion County agriculture (much of Marion County's cash receipts were from crops

requiring additional processing before sale).

TABLE I  
Cash Receipts of All Farm Products, Marion County<sup>a</sup>

<u>CROP</u>	<u>CASH RECEIPT 1970</u>	<u>CASH RECEIPT 1975</u>	<u>CASH RECEIPT 1976</u>
Small Fruits, Tree Fruits, Nuts	\$ 9,290,000	\$ 8,861,000	\$ 11,366,000
Specialty Horticultural Crop	2,450,000	13,125,000	15,675,000
Vegetables	13,581,000	29,102,000	20,591,000
Grass and Legume Seeds	9,355,000	5,842,000	6,542,000
Grain and Forage Crops			
Specialty Field Crops and Forestry	5,542,000	14,303,000	18,172,000
Livestock, Dairy, Poultry	<u>14,580,000</u>	<u>21,121,000</u>	<u>24,576,000</u>
TOTAL CASH RECEIPTS	\$54,798,000	\$108,245,000	\$110,429,000

<sup>a</sup>Source: Oregon State University Extension Service

According to Oregon's Department of Employment, the Salem standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA) had an annual average employment figure of 4,700 agricultural processing workers in 1976. This figure ran from a high of 11,000 workers in August to a low of 2,300 workers in January. This is up from 4,400 workers in 1975 (in 1970 this figure was 2,700). The point here being that each person employed spends wages on a local basis for goods and services, which again contributes to the overall multiplier effect within the local economy.

## PRESENT SITUATION EXAMINED

In the preceding section, Marion County's agricultural economy was reviewed. Basic to this chain of economic events is an adequate land base to produce needed agricultural products. However, competition for this land base is increasing each year.

For instance, rural subdivisions are exerting extensive conversion pressures throughout the county's agricultural land base. Rural subdivisions are defined as those divisions (with four or more lots) located outside the corporate limits of a city.

These subdivisions were of such a concern to the county planning department that a special study<sup>12</sup> was undertaken in 1974. Late in 1975 the results were released documenting the volume of rural land separations since 1962 (the year a subdivision ordinance was adopted).

According to that report, 146 subdivision applications were processed by the county planning commission. This involved nearly 8,000 acres of which 6,368 acres received approval for division. These 6,368 acres were separated into 2,483 lots at a resulting density of 2.56 acres per lot.

Decline in agricultural land is even more apparent when examining the most recent Census of Agriculture.

According to the following statistics, cropland has fluctuated over the last 25 years. For instance, 1974 figures for total cropland are approximately 5,000 acres more than 1969 figures. However, comparing 1974 to 1959 shows an overall decrease of 15,000 acres in the same category.

Although not totally substantiated, the increase in cropland

TABLE II

Selected Summary of Agricultural Land, Marion County, 1949-1974<sup>a</sup>

ITEM	YEAR			
	1949	1959	1969	1974
Land in Farms	389,683	351,397	302,065	306,110
Total Cropland	243,773	245,828	225,549	230,828
Total Woodland	94,195	68,114	38,851	35,395

<sup>a</sup>Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture

between 1969 and 1974 may have resulted from idle land being brought back into the production cycle. Higher prices paid for commodities and higher holding costs (property taxes primarily) likely forced some landowners to reinstitute production practices.

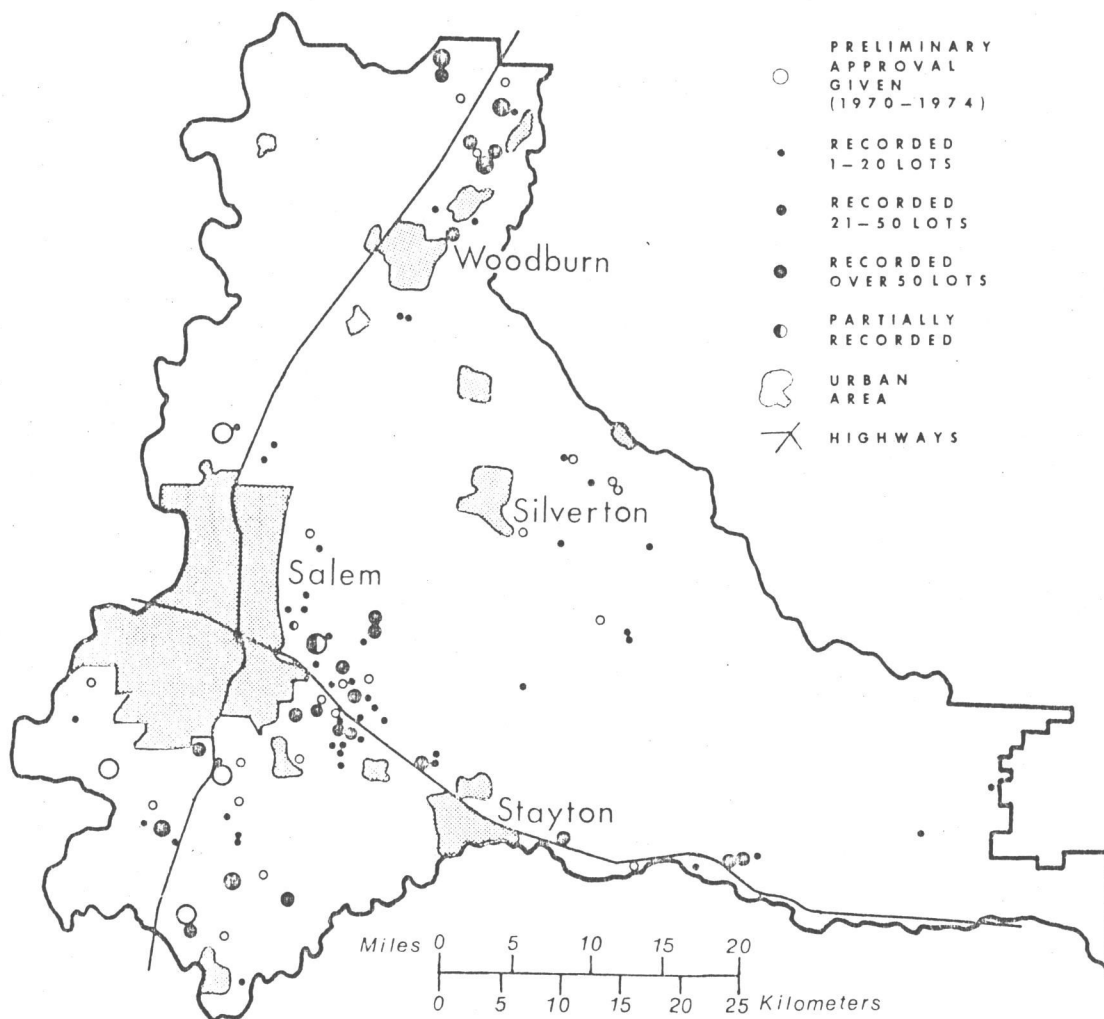
Though rural subdivision activity is not directly comparable to census material (in terms of years) it is evident that other uses are influencing the conversion process (highways, recreation, airports, reservoirs, etc.).

Another item of particular concern in terms of long-run effect, may be the substantial decrease in total woodland acres. Table II shows that nearly 60,000 acres of woodlands were lost over the last 25 years. In future years, this category may be important in sustaining an adequate supply of timber needs for local and state use.

#### What Lands Are Being Converted?

As shown on the map, rural subdivisions have tended to concentrate in close proximity to existing urban areas. It so happens that these particular areas are also very active in agricultural operations, and

# RURAL SUBDIVISION DEVELOPMENT 1962-1974



SOURCE: MARION PLANNING DEPARTMENT

produce a large portion of Marion County's specialty crops.

When comparing subdivision activities to specific soil classes, the data clearly indicates that a greater percentage is being located on Class I - III soils (soils that are of prime concern in terms of preservation) as compared to Class IV - VII soils.

Plotting subdivision location on the Soil Conservation Service's Soil Survey, approximately 4,800 acres (of a total 6,368 acres) were classified as being either Class I, II, III, or IV soils. This amounts to 75 percent of the total land involved.

TABLE III

Rural Subdivision Acreage According to Soil Capability Class

Soil Capability Class	Acres
Class I	24
Class II	2,178
Class III	1,621
Class IV	957
Class VI - VII	<u>1,588</u>
TOTAL	6,368

Table III indicates that those class lands commonly used for croplands are also under considerable pressure for residential development.

Why The Change?

An analysis of the data contained in the rural subdivision study<sup>13</sup> indicates there has been a change in philosophy concerning rural subdivision applications. For instance, some 808 lots or 30

subdivisions, have been denied by the planning commission between 1962 and 1975. Of that total, 29 have been denied since 1970. This is a remarkable change in attitude concerning the treatment of rural subdivisions and can be traced back to several items.

One item was the adoption of a county-wide comprehensive plan in 1972. Designated within that plan were generalized land use categories and specific land use policies. Both provided guidance and consistency in reviewing rural subdivision applications. Residentially suited lands were more clearly defined and agricultural lands were delineated.<sup>14</sup> In addition, various implementing ordinances were reviewed and refined.

Rural development policies were also adopted. For a number of years, decision makers had been finding that guidelines for the treatment of rural subdivisions were lacking. Drawing on prior experience, policies were formulated and adopted. Essentially, these policies assisted in supplementing existing comprehensive plan standards.

Another item affecting planning commission attitudes concerned the adoption of an urban growth policy. Of foremost importance in this policy was the concept of concentrating population within existing urban centers. This policy gave a "positive" direction to future urban expansion.

Several Oregon court cases reinforced local efforts in the treatment of rural subdivisions. "Fasano" (1972) addressed the issue of a public need being demonstrated when contemplating a land use change. In Marion County this "public need" concept is also being applied to the establishment of new rural developments. Applicants are being asked to provide data that demonstrates a need for further

residential lots within the area under consideration.

In 1975, a landmark case "Baker vs The City of Milwaukie" gave the comprehensive plan supremacy over zoning. This was important to Marion County because the zoning ordinance was enacted several years prior to the adoption of the comprehensive plan and many zones conflicted with the plans land use designations.

When in fact, zoning and the comprehensive plan are in conflict, the plan now takes precedence. This increased tremendously the reliance on long range planning efforts. No longer did the plan "set on the shelf."

State and federal directives also reinforced the planning commissions attitudes concerning farming activities. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Senate Bill 100 mandated that farm land in Classes I -IV should be preserved. If not followed at the county level, reasons must be listed as to why exceptions<sup>15</sup> have been taken to this rule. Following is a quote concerning this exception procedure.

"When, during the application of the statewide goals to plans, it appears that it is not possible to apply the appropriate goal to specific properties or situations, then each proposed exception to a goal shall be set forth during the plan preparation phases and also specifically noted in the notices of public hearing.

If the exception to the goal is adopted, then the compelling reasons and facts for that



conclusion shall be completely set forth in the plan and shall include:

- a. Why these other uses should be provided for;
- b. What alternative locations within the area could be used for the proposed uses;
- c. What are the long term environmental, economic, social and energy consequences to the locality, the region or the state from not applying the goal or permitting the alternative use;
- d. A finding that the proposed uses will be compatible with other adjacent uses."

Federal directives,<sup>16</sup> although not mandates, have also tended to support farmland retention efforts as evidenced by a Secretary of Agriculture memorandum:

"The continued loss of lands well suited to the production of food, forage, fiber, and timber, and the degradation of the environment resulting from those losses is a matter of growing concern to the nation. Major consideration must be given to prime lands and the long-range need to retain the productive capability and environmental values of American agriculture and forestry. Developments that result in irreversible land use changes represent a loss of valuable natural resources. The process is dramatic in some local areas. At the

national level individual losses appear small, but the cumulative effect can adversely impact domestic and international production.

"The concerns about wise use of prime lands are local, statewide, and national in scope. The loss of land suitable for sustained crop and wood production in a region or locality can influence the viability of supporting supply, processing and marketing facilities. Continued loss of farmland, range and forest land production affects the economy locally, influencing employment and income levels. In addition, it limits other qualities essential to the well-being of our people.

"Land use alternatives are generally available that can minimize impacts on prime lands. Such alternatives should be explored carefully, particularly where federal funds are involved. When possible, land use decisions should be avoided which irrevocably commit prime lands to non-farmland, non-range, and non-forestland uses, thereby foreclosing the options of future generations. USDA will urge all agencies to adopt the policy that federal activities that take prime agricultural land should be initiated only when there are no suitable alternative sites and when the action is in response to overriding

public need. The long-term implications of these land use conversions on the productive capacity of our farmland, range, and forest land, as well as on environmental impacts, should be evaluated and made known to the public.

"The Department, through the Land Use Committee, counterpart state and local committees, and the activities of all concerned agencies, groups, and organizations will advocate the protection of prime and unique farmlands, range, and forest lands from premature or unnecessary conversion to non-agricultural land use.\* Urban or built-up uses and water impoundments that preclude utilization or recovery to high quality agriculture or forestry purposes are of particular concern.

"State and local interests in retaining prime farmland, range and forest land for production are often based on concerns other than the demands for food, forage, fiber, or timber. Open space, environmental quality, visual quality, and local economic impacts are often cited as reasons for protecting these lands. Many of these lands have modest production capability, but are valued because of location and other unique factors that make them of state or local importance. Retaining

\* Emphasis added.

farmland, range, and forest land enhances local values and protects resource options for the future. The Department will make specific efforts to assist states and localities to identify lands of state and local concern and support efforts to protect these lands from premature or unnecessary conversion to other uses.\*

"The Statement on Land Use Policy (Secretary's Memorandum No. 1827) and the following specific policies are set forth for the guidance of the agencies in this Department in regard to prime lands:

1. Advocate the protection of prime lands from premature or unnecessary conversion to other land uses. Priority will be given to prime lands threatened by conversion to irreversible land uses.
2. Assure that environmental impact statement procedures and review processes thoroughly consider and evaluate the impact of major federal actions on prime farmland, range, and forest lands.
3. Emphasis will be placed on programs to inventory, assess and evaluate the Nation's farmland, range, and forest lands to assist decision makers and the general public's understanding of the kind, extent, location,

\*Emphasis added.

and current status of prime lands.

4. Cooperative efforts with states, local governments and universities will be initiated to assure concerns for food, fiber, and wood production are recognized and emphasized in the identification of prime lands.
5. USDA agency actions and programs will give thorough consideration to the local, state, and national concerns for the retention of prime lands. The necessity of conversion of these lands to other uses will be considered only after a determination that feasible alternatives do not exist or that overriding public needs warrant the action.
6. The agencies in the Department will review their programs to insure consistency with the intent of this supplement."

To a degree, this memorandum clarifies the position the United States Department of Agriculture is currently operating under. However, as noted in several studies quoted at the outset of this paper, conflicting opinions still exist at the national level. The county has experienced a change in attitude since 1970.

This gradual change in planning commission philosophy may be summed up by quoting a statement from the "Marion County Rural

Subdivision Study." It states, "This change was indicative of the gradual philosophical transformation experienced during these years by the planning commission. No longer do rural subdivisions receive the type of automatic approval which historically appeared typical of planning commission action. Gradually, emphasis and priorities in land use control have shifted to such an extent that a whole new set of values are now in evidence. These values are typified by such concepts as the preservation of agricultural lands, consumer protection, environmental concerns and public needs."

#### EMERGING EMPHASIS

The preceding section endeavored to establish a recent trend that is emerging in planning commission treatment of rural subdivisions. That trend being the precise, methodical review of rural development proposals. Approval is no longer automatic as demonstrated by the refusal of 29 out of 30 rural subdivisions in the first half of this decade.

This factor tends to indicate that decision makers are placing more emphasis on the preservation of productive farmland. It also reflects, to a certain extent the increased awareness of such amenities as open space, unique recreational areas, and other natural resources located throughout the county.

A similar trend is developing in the treatment of "special exceptions." A "special exception" is defined as a division of land in an agricultural zone (Exclusive Farm Use, Farm-20, etc.) for a non-related farm type use. Uses include residential, commercial, industrial and other categories. According to local planning department

files, 70 to 80 percent of the special exception cases have been denied over the last five years.

Several authorities have stated that at best, farm zoning is primarily a holding action for transitional uses.<sup>17</sup> Preferential assessment, although used considerably throughout the United States, also has its disadvantages in controlling certain kinds of uses in rural areas. In the Fifth Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality the following statement occurs: "Preferential assessment, by lowering the costs of holding lands for future development, can also stimulate leapfrog development on urban fringe."

In another report<sup>18</sup> published by the Committee on Government Operations, U.S. Senate, it was stated that ". . . only if there can be established a permanent relationship between zoning, tax, and assessment policy can we hope to regulate much fringe area development." That same publication later explores a "land value taxation" technique that would tax the land itself more intensively than improvements. Such a technique would place a high holding cost on vacant land in and around the city proper and force the landowner to develop sooner than might be expected. Speculative land holding would hopefully be developed prior to leapfrogging out on the urban fringe where land is less costly.

Others have suggested that purchase of development rights, land banking, various easement programs, capital improvement strategies, or the use of other techniques may be more satisfactory in controlling rural land uses.

### A New Criteria

Marion County has been placing increasing emphasis on policy criteria in evaluating developments in rural areas. The overall intent of this strategy is the maintaining of a low population density in rural areas (3 to 5 acres in lot size). Proposals are now viewed in terms of public need and potential conflicts that may result.

Specific criteria include:<sup>19</sup>

- "1. The immediate and future impact on public services.
2. The soil type and its developmental limitation such as slides, erosion, flooding, drainage, etc., will be considered with respect to its affect on the development.
3. The agricultural productivity and suitability of the area (soils considered productive for agricultural purposes) should be designed so as to minimize the effects on the terrain, slope and ground cover.
4. The development should be compatible with both the existing land use pattern and the land use proposed in the Comprehensive Plan.
5. The ability of the developer to provide an adequate quantity and quality of water (see Oregon Revised Statutes 92.090).
6. Will the development have any adverse effects on the existing road system and its ability to



handle increased traffic demands!

7. Is the development in the public interest, and is there a need or demand for the development based upon its facilities, lot sizes and location?"

The rural development policy further states:<sup>20</sup>

"If upon review of this policy it is found that the proposed development would be in conflict with the land use pattern established in the area or does not conform with other concerns listed above, the Planning Commission may view the development with disfavor."

Even more recently energy conservation concerns have tended to play a major role in examining rural developments. Those proposed developments in remote locations are having to justify, in terms of energy conservation, their existence.

A review of planning commission applications quickly shows that "zoning" is no longer the single criteria for approving proposed developments.

#### SUMMARY

Local policy stances have played a major role in the treatment of Marion County's agricultural land base. Increased awareness of agriculture's contributions in the local economy has also influenced local decision makers. Although public acceptance has not been universal, local support has leaned in the direction of protecting the county's agricultural resource. This is reflected by goals contained

in the comprehensive plan, and policies used by the planning commission in making day-to-day decisions concerning rural development.

Farm zoning has assisted in this process, but would have likely been less successful if used singly. As stated in the text of this paper, zoning is not a long term solution to agricultural land retention.

### CONCLUSION

On a macro-basis, Marion County's total contribution to agriculture productivity (feeding the world) is not substantial. However, as evidence in the county's overall policy direction it (the agricultural land base) is important to local citizens. Through the enactment of local goals, policies, and ordinances, productive farmland is being preserved for future generations.

State and national policies are also tending to place increased emphasis on retaining productive agriculture areas. This has tended to strengthen overall planning efforts.

## FOOTNOTES

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6. Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments, "An Urban Growth Policy for the Salem, Oregon Area," Salem, Oregon, 1974.
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17. Blobaum, Roger, The Loss of Agricultural Land, Citizen's Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality, 1700 Pennsylvania Ave., NE (Washington, D.C.), 1974, pp. 1-28.
18. Council on Environmental Quality, The Fifth Annual Report of the Council on Environmental Quality, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office), 1974, pp. 1-72.
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