

*Report Of A.A.C. Special
Meeting On Ways To
Preserve Agriculture On
The San Mateo County
Coast From Growers,
Operators, And Rural
Property Owners*



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Some Reasons For the Meeting

- Local Farm Owners, specifically family farms, are producing less and less acreage and many farms are closing.
- California Farm Bureau reports that California lost more than fifteen thousand farms between 2012 and 2022 according to the US Census of Agriculture.
- The San Mateo County Ag Commissioner reports that the San Mateo County annual crop report has literally changed data collection to include all flowers bunched into one group because flower production in our county has declined so significantly. Whereas in the past there were so many flowers that data collection was able to be collected for each specific flower species separately.
- The San Mateo County Crop report shows a significant decrease in crop production for most of our top crops in the past 10 years.
- Growers concerned about being able to continue farming here and as such many more plan to leave.



San Mateo County Crop report numbers regarding acres of production, for various row crops in the last decade of published data

Artichokes:

2013 : 59 acres in production

2023: 30 acres in production

Brussel Sprouts:

2013: 768 acres in production

2023: 419 acres in production

Peas:

2013: 202 acres in production

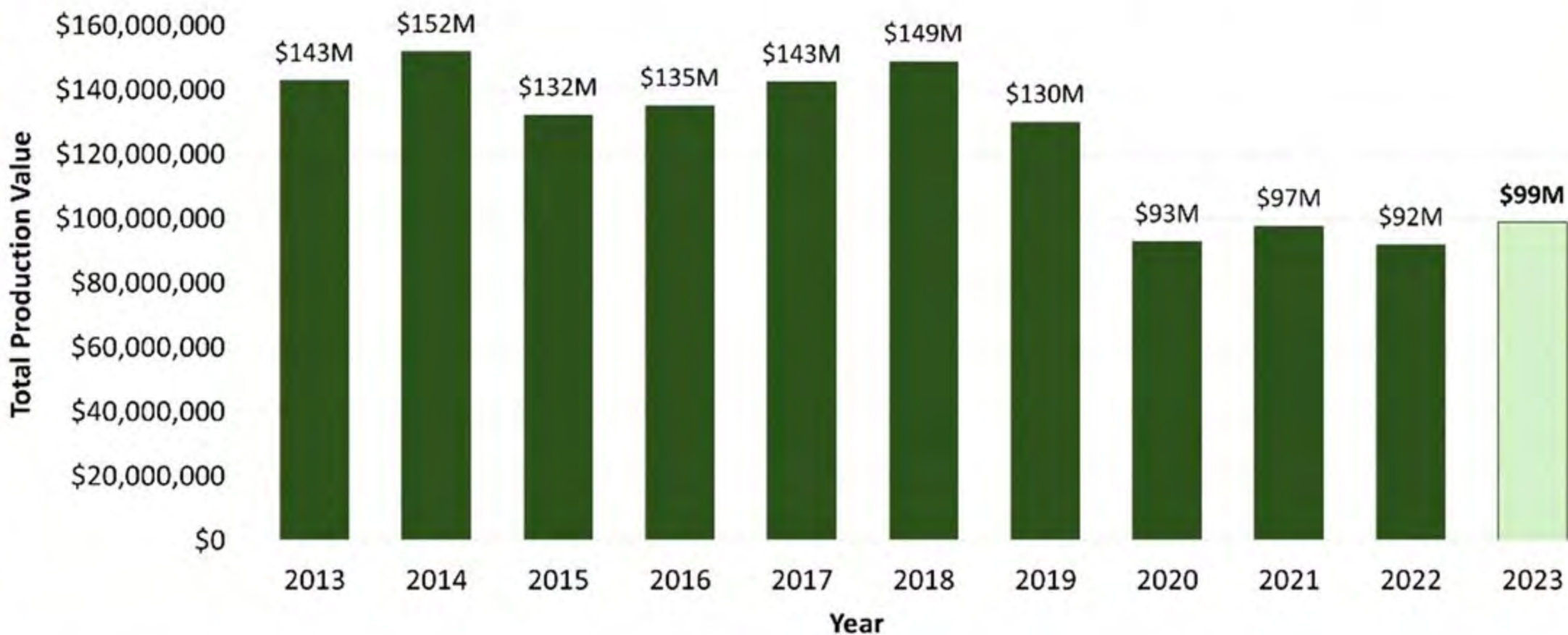
2023: 114 acres in production

Leeks:

2013: 133 acres in production

2023: 38 acres in production

San Mateo County Agricultural Production (2013-2023)



Why The Loss Of Crop Production

1. Many farmers are leaving due to the restrictions imposed on their ability to provide housing for their own family that work on the farm.
2. Access to water for irrigation has been prohibited
3. Stifling or costly regulations regarding farm production
4. Stifling or costly regulations for PAD or RMZ zoned parcels
5. A difference in what is allowed on Ag land, depending who owns it. (Non-Profit Organizations being allowed to do certain things on the same piece of land that the private land owner is not allowed to do, in many cases halting agriculture production.)
6. Leases for Ag land are being given to out of county residents rather than prioritizing San Mateo County residents who pay the MROSD taxes.

Concerns Reported from attendees After The Meeting and our responses

- Attendee's concern: The Media Covering the meeting didn't cover at all on the 24 items provided by those we invited to speak, Farmers, Growers and Rural Property Owners. Our response: The Sub Committee will pursue sending press releases to additional media sources, to pursue proper coverage.
- Attendee's concern: More Laborers and more farm labor housing isn't the issue. Those laborers will have nowhere to farm if there's no farms left, so preserving farms is the point. Our response: We agree. The regulations we propose on the matter clearly state that loosening the requirements for living in farm labor housing is for owners and operators and their families only, on their own land, thus preserving family farms continuing here.
- Attendee's concern: We should put Names In A hat for Speakers, rather than have them write ideas first. Our response: We will consider that for subsequent meetings, as we like that idea.

REPORTED COMMENTS from attendees after the meeting

- Comment from attendee: “Farming is dead here, and I’ve given up.” Our response: While we completely understand the feeling, ‘farming is dead here, I give up’, we also know that it wasn’t that long ago that farmers asked the county for specific guidelines for AgriTourism that we created, and that helped farms tremendously.
- Comment: “We need to have more meetings like these, this was great”.
- Comment: “Great turnout”
- Comment: “Good job keeping it positive and solution orientated, not allowing it to turn into a debate.”

Specific items we received from growers, operators and rural property owners that will help preserve farming on the San Mateo County Coast in the following 3 step input format:

1. Current regulations and/or what we currently have
2. The proposed change and/or solution
3. How such a solution helps preserve agriculture on our San Mateo County Coast.

* Note that some attendees voiced items without a proposed change or solution, so relevant solutions were taken from other participants and/or created to assist them.

Some of these items we would like to address with the county. Some of these items we can address in house, and some were general comments. After the presentation, as indicated from the inception of the meeting, we are only including input and solutions that are believed to help preserve ag production on the San Mateo county coast.

After the presentation the A.A.C. would like to review, discuss and vote on each individual item to determine which items, if not all, we would like to address with the county.

Item A: GENERAL COMMENT, HOUSING COMMENT FROM MEETING:

- Current situation from meeting attendee: Not allowing housing on family farms. Affordable housing = big investment w/ no return. Housing in town isn't helpful.
- Solution/proposal from meeting attendee: We need housing on the actual farms.
- How it preserves Ag on SMCO coast from meeting attendee: families stay stable and continue to farm here as they can afford to live here.
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Item B: GENERAL COMMENT FROM MEETING

- Current situation from meeting attendee: There's too much time spent trying to prevent abuse
- Solution/proposal from meeting attendee: support each other and remove obstacles, less regulation

How it preserves ag on SMC0 coast from meeting attendee: Not big delay in time, future owners don't get discouraged.

Item C: FARM LABOR HOUSING COMMENT

from meeting

- Current situation from meeting attendee: The definition of San Mateo County labor/ worker that lives in farm labor worker housing must work at least 20 hours per week in agriculture AND a minimum of 50% of their income must come from agriculture.
- Solution/proposal from meeting attendee: To live in farm labor housing, for property owners, farm owners and their families only, living in farm labor housing units on their families private ag land, it should be required that they must work a minimum of 20 hrs. a week in agriculture OR a minimum 50% of their income must be earned from agriculture.
- How it preserves ag on SMCO coast from meeting attendee: This would enable farm families to live on the farms to help, manage, oversee and have security on the family farm, with the flexibility to work elsewhere by having supplemental or main income. And mostly having the younger generation to continue the farm. As farm income alone does not provide enough money these days for the younger generation to work the farm as their main source of income and as such, under the current requirements, descendants will choose other professions and the farm will close.
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Item D: LAND USAGE COMMENT from meeting

- Current situation from meeting attendee: Private owned land has many restrictions whereas the same land owned by Mid Peninsula Open Space District does not have to adhere to the same restrictions.

Solution/proposal from meeting attendee: To keep things equal, research needs to be done to see what requirements Open Space needs to adhere to, in comparison to what private land owners need to adhere to. Examples: Usage and Subdivisions with different rules.

How it preserves ag on the SM county coast from meeting attendee: Allowing privately owned land to have the same considerations as Open Space is an "even playing field" and reduces the opportunity for Open Space to buy up land because farmers can't do things with it, but Open Space can. When farmers don't have land to farm their farms close. Adding to the uneven playing field is that Mid Peninsula Open Space District isn't required to pay taxes like the private landowner.

Item E: ZONING REQUIREMENTS comment from meeting

- Current situation from meeting attendee: Taller buildings are allowed in some zones and not in others.

Solution/Proposal from meeting attendee: It needs to be an even playing field. If conducive to agriculture the allowable height of buildings on P.A.D. and RMZ zoned land should be comparable to other zoned parcels. *Research needs to be done on ordinances in different locations.

How it preserves agriculture on the SM county coast from meeting attendee: It meets the needs of farm labor housing and agriculture production on private property if similar buildings can be built there.

Item F: ZONING REQUIREMENTS comment from meeting

- Current situation from meeting attendee: There's a need to create more avenues for farmers to live and farm their land, especially beginners as ADU's are not allowed on P.A.D. land. Additionally, Farmers leasing land cannot build. A congressman is currently asking for 1800 square ft homes to be allowed as adu's here, yet on P.A.D. land not even 1 square footage is allowed.
- Solution/proposal from meeting attendee: Allow P.A.D. zoned land to be used for tiny home/ ADU/RV with some discretion. Regarding Tiny homes, tiny homes require septic systems and potable H2O. Regulations like those in RV parks would allow for a doable tiny home option. RVs could be Stay/Destination RVs.
- How it preserves agriculture on the SMCO coast from meeting attendee: Assists with multigenerational farm housing so that family farms can continue. Lowers the barrier for entry into farming for beginners.
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Item G: GENERAL COMMENT from meeting

- Current situation/concern from meeting attendee: The problem is that we are *focusing on farm labor housing before farm production. Farmland and production has been lost, so there needs to be support for farm production first so that laborers will have a place to labor.
- Solution/proposal from meeting attendee: Change our focus to farms and farm production as more farms are needed not more workers.
- How it preserves agriculture on the San Mateo County coast from meeting attendee: Without farms to work laborers won't be able to labor, won't have a place to work.

Item H: GENERAL COMMENT from meeting

Current situation/concern from meeting attendee: No path for younger generation to farm, only path thru family. There isn't any backing to get kids into ag here from county. For profit farms can't have unpaid internships. We need more opportunities to showcase our ag here.

Solution/proposal from meeting attendee: Provide internships with row crop farmers etc. Farm programs in schools. Working with schools such as Brisa Ranch is doing. Are there county programs that can help kids get into ag here at a young age at for profit farms?

How it preserves agriculture on the San Mateo County Coast from meeting attendee: multigenerational farming. *The San Mateo County Agricultural Advisory Committee is addressing this.

Item I: GENERAL COMMENT from meeting

- Current situation/Concern from meeting attendee: Agriculture is Overregulated here
- Solution/proposal from meeting attendee: Regulations need to be reduced. Review regulations for similar items in other counties and implement less restrictive policies for farm owners, growers and rural property owners regarding land use and farm policies. SB539 was implemented to help farmers by an assessor in San Luis Obispo County. Work with legislators here.
- How it preserves agriculture on the San Mateo County Coast from meeting attendee: people can stay and farm here.

Item J: WATER from meeting

- Current situation/concern from meeting attendee: We need water resources here, Hetch Hetchy is 100 + yrs old. Ponds are not enough. Well permits are excessively priced.
- Solution/proposal from meeting attendee : A.A.C. Meet with Resource Conservation District to discuss options to review and/or develop more water for irrigation for farms.
- How it preserves agriculture on the San Mateo County Coast from meeting attendee : This helps create a solution. With water for crop production farms can continue farming here.

Item K: WATER RIGHTS and LAND from meeting

- Current situation/concern from meeting attendee : When Mid-Pen and POST came here, they vowed to support Agriculture in our area and support its viability. They've turned their backs on agriculture: they have taken away water rights for irrigation, decreasing farm production, they are now leasing SMC ag land to out of county residents, displacing farmers who live here and need land.
- Solution/proposal from meeting attendee : We are requesting that Mid-Pen and POST meet with the A.A.C., separately, to explain their policies in choosing tenants, in hopes that a system can be created that prioritizes tax paying San Mateo County residents first.
- How it preserves agriculture on The San Mateo County coast from meeting attendee : Farmers with a proven history of longevity farming here will be able to continue farming here as they will have access to water and land and won't be forced to leave.

Item L: Water/Farm Labor Housing from meeting

- Current situation/concern from meeting attendee : POST took away water rights and removed Farm Labor Housing on family farm. That pushed farm away, stopped production on multiple acres due to their removal of water rights and Farm Labor Housing.

Solution/proposal from meeting attendee : Since POST publicly promotes their support of agriculture, it should be required that they publicly report any of their policies or actions that take agriculture out of production as well.

How it preserves agriculture on the San Mateo County coast from meeting attendee : Transparency helps people make informed decisions that effect agriculture in our area.

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Item M: Housing/Zoning from meeting

- Current situation/Concern from meeting attendee : When we subdivide land and put a parcel into low-income housing in SMC we are made to put it into low-income housing in perpetuity. This deters multi generational family members from building their homes on their own land and staying here to help farming and investing in the home as the value is so low.
- Solution/proposal from meeting attendee : In Santa Cruz County they are made to put a new parcel, made through subdivision, into low-income housing for just 10 yrs. We propose our criteria be the same as SC county, 10 years. Ideally it should be none, but there is no reason to make it more than 10 yrs to be in line with our neighboring county. We need fairness.
- How it preserves agriculture on the San Mateo County coast from meeting attendee : This helps preserve ag in our area because parents will be more inclined to encourage their kids to build on the property as such a large investment as a home won't be tied to a low value forever, thus being a viable investment and one that justifies staying, living and farming here.
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Item N: Multi-Generational Farms from meeting

- Current situation from meeting attendee : Proposition 19, approved by California voters in 2020 and effective February 16, 2021, impacts property tax benefits for family farm transfers. While it maintains some exclusions, it modifies previous rules, potentially increasing property taxes for some inherited farms. Specifically, value limit and Partial Reassessment: If the farm's fair market value exceeds the existing Proposition 13 factored base year value plus \$1 million (adjusted for inflation), the amount over this limit is added to the existing base year value for a new taxable value. This typically increases property taxes so significantly that heirs can no longer retain the farm.
- Solution/Proposal from meeting attendee: According to an article from Brent Burchett, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo Farm Bureau, Senate Bill 539 now clarifies that each legal parcel, rather than the farm or ranch as a whole will be assessed as a "family farm" under Prop 19 thanks to the work of San Luis Obispo Farm Bureau, and assessor Tom Bordonaro, among others. Meet with representatives to discuss additional ways we can create further exemptions for family farms in our county to make prop 19 less impactful.
- How it preserves Ag on The San Mateo County Coast from meeting attendee : Multi-generational Families can continue to farm here as they won't be subject to such a significant increase in property taxes to retain their farm upon the death of a parent.

ITEM O: FARM LABOR HOUSING LOAN PROGRAM:

- Current situation: The new Farm labor housing loan program imposes an income limit on farm workers who can live in the units, thus keeping the farm workers income at poverty level, stifling the workers financial growth. This farm labor housing loan program requires that the land owner keep the unit in Farm Labor housing with the income restriction for 30 years even if the loan is paid off in full before that time thus lowering the property value of the land. There is no provision that the "improvement" will not trigger a reassessment of property, for property taxes. The Farm Labor housing loan program is not a forgivable loan as it was previously so the cost/benefit to the family farm/ land owner is different whereas the above restrictions may have been acceptable from a cost benefit standpoint in the old program when it was a forgivable loan. The credit applied to the loan balance for each month that the worker is charged less than the allowable rent is helpful.
- Solution/proposal: Rather than rely on the Farm Labor Housing task force and prior surveys that were in response to a loan program that was a different loan program "A forgivable loan program" the county using funds to create these programs should meet with the farmers directly through groups such as the A.A.C. and work jointly with them prior to create the loans in a way that will optimize their use. The program is said to have launched on Aug 7th, 2025. While it's after the fact, we ask that that county housing meet with A.A.C. to jointly consider creating specific amendments or exemptions that address the above concerns to make the program feasible.
- How it preserves ag on the San Mateo County Coast: A loan program that can be beneficial to farmers and landowners (and not damaging) will be used. Adjustments without restrictions that stifle employee growth, lowering property values and triggering reassessment of prop taxes could make these loans doable from a cost/benefit standpoint and help family farms stay here amidst the other high costs of production in our area.
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REVIEW, DISCUSSION AND VOTE ON COUNTY ITEMS

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- [ITEM C](#)
- [ITEM F](#)
- [ITEM L](#)
- [ITEM M](#)
- [ITEM O](#)