

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 6, 2024
To: Summer Burlison and Sonal Aggarwal, San Mateo County Planning Department
From: Eliza Milio, Agricultural Ombudsman
Re: Agricultural Production, Processing, and Storage on Multiple Parcels

County Planners Summer Burlison and Sonal Aggarwal met with Agricultural Ombudsman Eliza Milio regarding whether agricultural production must take place on the same site where agricultural products are processed and/or stored for the site to be designated as “Agriculture” as set forth in the Planned Agricultural District Regulations. The discussion centered on the fact that the PAD does not include language that directly addresses this issue. The Agricultural Ombudsman suggested that a requirement for on-site production may not have been the intention or the best interpretation of the PAD. This memo summarizes that discussion.

Very often, agricultural infrastructure (e.g. farm stands, storage, refrigeration, and processing) on a parcel is not directly related to production on that same parcel. For example:

- A single farm business may grow crops at multiple properties but only have processing infrastructure at one site.
- Many agricultural operations in the county are tenants, who are prohibited from building infrastructure on their landlords’ properties, e.g. when the land is owned by a land trust or open space district and is subject to conservation easements or other restrictions on development. At other times, it is not feasible to build infrastructure due to the duration of leases or other lease terms.
- Production may rotate across different parcels of land for environmental benefits consistent with the County’s Community Climate Action Plan. Associated infrastructure typically does not move to different properties alongside rotational grazing and/or rotational row crop production.

This interpretation is comparable to that of Marin County, which explicitly defines ag use as that produced on-site or elsewhere in the County. Marin County’s Development Code describes “**Agricultural Accessory Activity (land use)**. This land use consists of accessory activities customarily incidental to agricultural operations, and which involve agricultural products produced only on-site or elsewhere in Marin County, including..” [list of various activities including drying, pre-cooling, packaging, or preparing products].