

CALFED Bay-Delta Program
Discussion of Agricultural Impacts
As Defined by CEQA & NEPA

January 1997

This discussion has been prepared in response to recent questions and comments regarding the treatment of agricultural issues in CALFED project planning and environmental documentation.

The California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act require that the consequences of an action be made available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made. Revealing the effects of an action on agricultural lands are an integral part of this disclosure. CEQA identifies the conversion of prime agricultural land to non-agricultural use or impairment of the agricultural productivity of prime agricultural land to be one of 26 "significant effects" defined in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. Examples of other significant effects defined in Appendix G include substantial effects on: rare or endangered species or their habitats, increase in noise levels, and degradation or depletion of ground water resources. The Council on Environmental Quality in a memorandum dated August 11, 1980 discussed how the implementing regulations for NEPA are to be used to account for the impacts of an action on prime or unique farmlands.

Similar to other resources, CALFED recognizes the importance of avoiding or reducing impacts to agriculture to the greatest extent possible. For example:

During component/alternative development,

- CALFED staff with the assistance of agency and stakeholder experts will attempt to define program level actions which minimize adverse impacts, and maximize benefits to agriculture.

During programmatic impact analysis and preparation of the environmental documents,

- Potential adverse and beneficial consequences for agriculture and other resource areas will be clearly identified.
- These consequences will be used to further refine the alternatives during Phase II so that benefits are maximized and adverse impacts are minimized to the extent possible.
- For potential adverse impacts which cannot be avoided, mitigation strategies will be identified which will reduce the impacts to a less than significant level.

There is the potential that some adverse impacts to agriculture or other resource categories cannot be reduced to a less than significant level, even with the application of mitigation strategies. These impacts will be clearly identified for all resource areas in the environmental document. Every effort will be made to avoid or reduce adverse impacts to the greatest extent possible.