

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Lester Snow

FROM: Michael G. Heaton

DATE: May 8, 1998

SUBJECT: How much prime ag land is there in California?

The following information is derived from Farmland Conversion Report 1992-1994, produced by the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program in the California Department of Conservation. Contact person is David Patch at 324-0859.

The Dept of Conservation has categorized about 26 million acres of agricultural lands as of 1994. Almost 14 million acres is grazing land. Of the remaining acreage, about 95 million is categorized as "important" farmland. "Important" farmland is further categorized as "prime", "statewide", "unique" or "local".

In 1994, Dept of Conservation identified 4,264,489 acres of "prime" ag land in the counties it has mapped. Mapping is incomplete in a number of counties, including western Stanislaus and Fresno counties, where one might expect considerable acreage of prime land. So the actual amount of prime ag land is probably higher by at least several hundred thousand acres. A reasonable estimate might be on the order of 5 million acres statewide.

"Prime" ag land is defined as: Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long term production of agricultural crops. This land has the soil quality, growing season and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. The land must have been used for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date.

Other aggie factoids from the Dept of Food and Ag's web site:

Dept of Food and Ag reports 29 million acres in agricultural production for 1996. This is a rough total and include cropped land, pasture and grazing lands. It does not include timber or forest lands.

There are 350 crop and livestock commodities recognized in California, with a farm gate production value in 1996 of \$24.5 Billion. There were 78,000 farms in California in 1996.

If the next question is how much prime ag land will be lost as a result of CALFED program, we may want to bring in one of the Mapping Program staffers to help us look at that issue.