

# Managing Public Access in Agricultural Areas

*Measures that may be considered to address and enhance the compatibility of public access and agricultural land uses may include:*

- *Trail routes that discourage volunteer trails, and that do not bisect agricultural areas*
- *Low-impact trail designs that provide a well-defined route that encourages users to stay on the designated trail (e.g., well-marked, with landscaping or features that discourage movement off-trail into agricultural areas)*
- *Low-key fencing as necessary*
- *Directive or educational signage*
- *Prohibition of dogs, or leash requirements*
- *Coastal access amenities (e.g., benches, coastal access parking, restrooms, and viewing areas) that encourage coastal access and recreation in designated areas located away from agricultural operations to the extent feasible*
- *In some circumstances, limited seasonal restrictions on trail use*

Issues have been raised from time to time by some farmers and ranchers about the difficulties of allowing public access in or near agricultural areas. There has been some concern that these two uses can be incompatible. However, public access and related facilities, such as trails, parking and restrooms, can typically be effectively managed within and adjacent to agricultural areas in a way that allows for access while avoiding impacts to agricultural operations. Access on or near agricultural land can also provide an important opportunity for the public to gain a better understanding of, and build support for, food and fiber production. This factsheet describes measures that can be taken to address and enhance the compatibility of public access and agricultural land uses.

The specific requirements of Sections 30212 and 30214, and the policies and provisions of certified Local Coastal Programs (LCPs) that incorporate the requirements of Sections 30212 and 30214, should be evaluated when there are potential compatibility issues between agriculture and public access. Section 30212 mandates that agriculture not be adversely affected as a result of public access. Section 30214 supports compatibility between public access and agricultural land uses by identifying time, place and manner criteria that can help ensure compatibility.

A case-by-case analysis is needed to identify appropriate compatibility measures, which may take many forms. Compatibility measures commonly focus on good design and management, such as appropriately locating trail features and parking, controlling erosion and trash, installing fencing and gates, maintaining landscaping, and

installing signage. Attention should be paid to the question of whether dogs must be excluded or may accompany hikers, and if so, whether leashes are mandatory. Seasonal restrictions or other limits on availability of access may also be appropriate. For example, such restrictions could accommodate agricultural operations that involve significant dust or spraying. If conflicts involve theft or vandalism, managers may seek fencing or other means to separate trail corridors (e.g., through the use of vegetated buffers or berms).

Sometimes the public may raise concerns about the compatibility of agricultural operations and public accessways. There are numerous examples among state and regional park districts where public access and agricultural uses, especially grazing, are effectively managed. However, some trail users may prefer fenced trail corridors adjacent to fields. Agricultural managers can take steps to ensure the compatibility of uses. At Point Reyes National Seashore, where the public is allowed to traverse pasturelands, livestock operators with grazing leases have made it a practice to select livestock with gentle dispositions suitable for pastures accessible to the public.<sup>1</sup> Where parties raise concerns about liability

---

<sup>1</sup> Hart, John. (1992). *Farming on the Edge: Saving Family Farms in Marin County, California*. University of California Press.

for risks of accident or injury to the public using dedicated trails, a brochure explaining legal protections for landowners can be accessed through the following link:  
<https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/access/limitations-liability.pdf>.

Compatibility issues between coastal access and agricultural operations have the potential to arise in the coastal zone. Where such compatibility issues arise, the Coastal Act lays out a framework to manage the time, place, and manner of access to avoid the potential for adverse impacts on agriculture. Each situation must be carefully examined on a case-by-case basis to understand the potential for incompatibility as well as determine appropriate measures to ensure that agriculture is not adversely affected. If potential compatibility issues arise, mitigating measures relating to time, place and manner can ensure compatibility between coastal access and agriculture.

*This document was prepared with financial assistance provided by the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, administered by the Office for Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Grant Award NA14NOS4190100.*