

CHAPTER 11. FARMLANDS

1. INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS.

a. **General.** Important farmlands include all pasturelands, croplands, and forests (even if zoned for development) considered to be prime, unique, or statewide or locally important lands as defined below:

(1) **Prime farmland.** This is land having the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, and other agricultural crops with minimal use of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, or products.

(2) **Unique farmland.** This is land used for producing high-value food and fiber crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture necessary to produce high quality crops or high yields of them economically.

(3) **Statewide and locally important farmland.** This is land that has been designated as "important" by either a state government (State Secretary of Agriculture or higher office) or by county commissioners or an equivalent elected body. The State Conservationist representing the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)¹ must agree with the designation.

b. **Important farmland designations.** NRCS has the final authority for designating important farmlands and keeps lists of important farmlands for each state. Usually, the lands are defined by their soil types, but sometimes, the designations are made independent of soil types. Instead they are mapped according to existing ground cover and use.

2. APPLICABLE STATUTES AND IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS.

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) of 1984 (7 USC Sections 4201-4209) as amended, provides the statutory framework for considering important farmlands in Federal decisions.).

APPLICABLE STATUTE AND IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION	OVERSIGHT AGENCY
Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA), 7 USC 4201-4209 as amended by section 1255 of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 USC 3801-3862	The FPPA regulates actions with the potential to convert existing important farmlands to non-agricultural uses.	NRCS
7 CFR Part 657, Prime and Unique Farmlands	Defines the purpose, general policy, and applicability of FPPA and provides guidelines for identifying important farmlands.	NRCS
7 CFR Part 658, Farmland Protection Policy	Provides guidelines for using FPPA criteria; lists the criteria and identifies how Federal agencies can seek NRCS assistance through	NRCS

¹ NRCS is an agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

	formal consultation.	
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APPLICABLE STATUTE AND IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS	SUMMARY DESCRIPTION	OVERSIGHT AGENCY
Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Memorandum on Analysis of impacts on Prime and Unique Agricultural Lands in Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). See 45 Federal Register 59189	CEQ sought information on existing and proposed regulations or directives the agency would use to preserve or mitigate effects of agency actions on prime and unique farmlands. CEQ also requested information on actions that would likely have significant impacts on these farmlands. Lastly, CEQ requested the names of officials responsible for carrying out an agency's agricultural land policies.	NRCS

3. APPLICABILITY TO AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS. Any airport development action funded under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) or subject to FAA approval that would permanently convert an existing designated important farmland to a non-agricultural use is subject to FPPA coordination. Typical actions, which could involve such coordination include: airside/landside expansion (new or expanded terminal and hangar facilities, new or extended runways and taxiways, airfield lighting, navigational aids, NAVAIDS, etc.); land acquisition for aviation-related use, new or relocated access roadways, remote parking facilities, and rental car lots, and any other actions that would result in important farmland conversion. FPPA does not apply to land already committed to "urban development or water storage" (i.e., airport developed areas), regardless of its importance as defined by NRCS. Therefore, when evaluating potential impacts on farmlands, evaluate only those areas designated as important and that are in active agricultural use or not yet developed.

4. PERMITS, CERTIFICATIONS, AND APPROVALS. Evidence of proper compliance under FPPA requires receiving a completed Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form (AD-1006) or a completed Land Evaluation Site Assessment (LESA), if applicable. Either document must provide the numerical score of the proposed action as determined by an appropriate representative of the NRCS or state government. Sections 6 and 7 of this chapter provide more information on this form and its score.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE PROCEDURE - ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS. Airport development projects that would convert important farmland must be coordinated with the local NRCS field office. Consultation procedures involve the sponsors' preparation of appropriate portions of a USDA Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form AD-1006 and submission to the NRCS field office for completion. Form AD-1006 contains a scoring system to determine the significance of potential project impacts. Scoring information should be supplied for each project alternative, if the alternative would involve important farmland.

6. DETERMINING IMPACTS.

a. Completing Form AD 1006. The sponsor, acting on FAA's behalf, should complete the section of Form AD 1006 labeled, "To be completed by the Federal Agency." Besides completing Parts I and III, include a location map. The map should show the proposed action and/or any reasonable alternative involving important farmland. Include information about the proposed action in Part III under "Site A." As necessary, place information about reasonable alternatives under "Site B," "Site C," etc. The sponsor should send the Form to the appropriate NRCS office.

b. NRCS Input. After receiving the sponsor's input to Form AD 1006, NRCS will provide "relative value" scores for sites under consideration. Scores range from 0 to 100 and represent the site's value for agricultural production. NRCS will complete Parts IV and V of the form. NRCS must respond to the sponsor within 10 days of receiving the Form, unless NRCS decides to visit the site. In that instance, NRCS will respond in 30 working days. If NRCS determines the FPPA does not apply to the site, further analysis of project impacts on farmland is unnecessary. If NRCS fails to respond within the designated review periods, or if further delay would interfere with construction activities, the sponsor should inform FAA of that fact and continue as though the site were not farmland.

c. Further Sponsor input. On receiving NRCS's input, the sponsor will perform more analysis. Using the site assessment criteria in 7 CFR Section 658.5(b), the sponsor, on FAA's behalf, will calculate the "site assessment" score to determine each site's fitness for protection as farmland.

Note: Many states and local governments have developed LESA systems to evaluate land productivity and suitability for conversion to non-agricultural uses. As a result, these governments may have evaluated a site's agricultural fitness by using criteria similar to those in 7 CFR Section 658.5(b). Contact the appropriate state agricultural agency to determine if the LESA may be substituted for the score that would be derived via the "site assessment" criteria in Form AD 1006. When NRCS points out a local LESA is available, the sponsor must evaluate the site using local criteria to complete Part VI of Form AD 1006 instead of Federal criteria in 7 CFR Section 658.5(b).

d. Environmental document information. If the action requires completion of Form AD 1006, include a copy of the completed Form in an appendix to the environmental document.

7. DETERMINING IMPACT SIGNIFICANCE.

a. General. The responsible FAA official should consider the following information in consultation with NRCS or the state agency having jurisdiction over important farmland potentially affected. Total the NRCS's "relative value" score (i.e., 0 - 100) and the sponsor's "site assessment" score (i.e., 0-160). Use this sum (Form AD 1006, Part VI) to determine the severity of the expected farmland impacts. Impact severity increases as the total, combined score approaches 260 points. Total, combined scores below 160 do not require further analysis. Total, combined scores between 161 and 200 may have the potential to adversely affect important farmlands. They require considering alternatives or measures, such as reducing the acreage of important farmland converted, or finding land having lower relative value, to avoid converting the farmland.

ORDER 1050.1E THRESHOLD	FACTORS TO CONSIDER
When the total combined score on Form AD 1006 ranges between 200 and 260, a significant impact would likely occur. Try to find practical factors, methods, or alternatives to lower the score. Total scores continuing to range between 200 and 260 are significant impacts.	None.

From: Table 7-1, FAA Order 5050.4B.

b. Mitigation. During the environmental review process, agencies having jurisdiction or special use expertise about important farmland normally provide letters addressing this resource. Often, those letters include recommended measures to mitigate project effects. An appendix to the environmental document should include copies of those letters. The environmental document should summarize the most important information in those letters and accurately cross-reference the appendix and pages in that appendix for further information. If the FAA or the sponsor did not adopt any recommended mitigation, the environmental document should clearly explain why the recommendation was not adopted.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT CONTENT.

a. General. FAA must prepare an EIS if mitigation will not reduce impacts below the significance threshold noted in section 7 of this chapter. When the responsible FAA official determines that a significant impact is likely, FAA must prepare an EIS addressing project-induced farmland conversion impacts. The EIS must contain the following information as well as a copy of Form AD 1006 and the information discussed in preceding sections of this chapter.

(1) Impacts. An assessment of the action's impacts on the area's agricultural production;

(2) Compatibility. An analysis of the action's compatibility with state, local, and private farmland protection programs and policies;

(3) Disruption. A description of any disruption of the farming community that directly results when the proposed action changes farmland to non-agricultural use;

(4) Support services. An evaluation of how the farmland conversion will affect the viability of farm support activities.

b. Mitigation. The EIS should describe proposed mitigation when land use agencies provide that information. FAA should fully consider the mitigation and balance its benefits against those of the proposed action. Provide an estimated schedule for undertaking accepted mitigation. Explain why the sponsor or FAA did not adopt any mitigation measures agencies recommend. Those measures may include reducing the area of land removed from production, keeping as much land as possible for agricultural use by incorporating it into airport compatible land use plans, or similar efforts.