

**GODINHO DAIRY EXPANSION CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT NO.
CUP25-009**

INITIAL STUDY AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

SEPTEMBER 2026

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INITIAL STUDY AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Project Title:	Godinho Dairy Expansion Project Conditional Use Permit No. CUP25-009
Project Location:	12710 S. Wilson Road and 13140 Johnson Road Los Banos, CA 93635
Lead Agency Name and Address:	Merced County Community and Economic Development Department 2222 'M' Street Merced, CA 95340
Contact Person and Phone Number:	Mark Hamilton, Planner III Phone: (209) 385-7654
General Plan Designation:	Agricultural (Merced County General Plan)
Zoning:	A-1, General Agricultural (Merced County Zoning)

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Godinho Dairy LP (Applicant) proposes an expansion of an existing dairy facility in unincorporated Merced County, California. The proposed project involves a request for Conditional Use Permit (CUP) No. CUP25-009 to expand dairy operations through the construction of new dairy facilities and an increase in herd size. Proposed improvements include the construction of five (5) new barns for animal housing, a commodity barn, a feed storage area and a new wastewater retention pond.

The Godinho Dairy is located on approximately 83.9 acres of an existing farm totaling approximately 282.4 acres in unincorporated Merced County. The dairy project site and associated heifer facilities are located north and south of Henry Miller Avenue at 12710 S. Wilson Road and 13140 Johnson Road in the Los Banos area of the County. The project cropland application area consists of approximately 1,476 acres located on portions of 31 parcels. The project site is zoned General Agricultural (A-1) in the Merced County (County) municipal code and designated General Agricultural (A) in the 2030 Merced County General Plan (General Plan) (County of Merced 2013). Additional lands controlled by the Applicant and used for farming operations associated with the dairy are to the north, south and east of the project site.

The existing Godinho Dairy facility has operated since approximately 1975 and was historically used as a small dairy supporting about 300 milk cows and 500 total head. Although no Merced County permits are on file for the original animal confinement operation, several permits have been issued for onsite residences and facility improvements, including CUP2575 (1981) for a mobile home, AA00076 (2000) for second and third residences, and CUP19-006 (2020), which authorized expansion of the heifer dairy and brought the operation into compliance with state regulations by increasing herd capacity from 1,103 to 2,123 animal units. Following acquisition of the property in 2009, the applicant converted the site to a heifer-rearing operation. The former milking parlor was

demolished, and the facility no longer has the ability to milk cows. The existing heifer facility is regulated by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, both of which will rely on the County's environmental review in considering approvals associated with the proposed dairy and heifer facility expansion.

Conditional Use Permit No. CUP25-009 proposes to combine the existing dairy and heifer facilities and expand them from 5,171 mature cows (4,000 milking and 1,171 dry) and 3,030 support stock to 7,000 mature cows (6,000 milking and 1,000 dry) and 7,000 support stock. The project proposes the addition of five (5) barns for animal housing totaling 428,080 square feet; a commodity barn of 20,100 square feet; a feed storage area of 219,170 square feet (concrete pad no building); and a new wastewater retention pond. Existing building square footage to be removed is approximately 59,000 square feet. No amenities and no new improvements or services for utilities (i.e., water, power, natural gas, sanitary sewer) are proposed. Crops grown on site would continue to be used for dairy feed crops. Zoning on the site is A-1, General Agricultural.

The Merced County Community and Economic Development Department has determined that the proposed project may result in significant environmental effects and that preparation of an environmental impact report (EIR) is the appropriate level of environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15124, this chapter provides the information required of an EIR project description, including a description of the project's precise location and boundaries; a statement of the project's objectives; a description of the project's technical, economic, and environmental characteristics; a description of the intended uses of this EIR (including a list of the public agencies expected to rely on it in their decision-making processes); a list of the permits and approvals required to implement the project; and a summary of related environmental review and consultation requirements.

LOCATION

The active dairy facilities of Godinho Dairy are located on approximately 83.9 acres of an existing farm totaling approximately 282.4 acres in unincorporated Merced County (see Figure 1). The dairy project site and associated heifer facilities are located north and south of Henry Miller Avenue at 12710 S. Wilson Road and 13140 Johnson Road in the Los Banos area of the County. The project's location is within the central California region (see Figures 1 and 2). The active dairy facilities on the north side of Henry Miller Avenue are located on Merced County Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 070-180-044, 010-180-028, 170-180-045, and 070-201-010 and the associated heifer facilities on the south side of Henry Miller Avenue are located on APN 081-020-028. Additional parcels in the vicinity are used as cropland and for wastewater and manure application. The existing project cropland application area consists of approximately 1,476 acres located on portions of 31 parcels (see Figure 2 for the project location, Figure 3 for Merced County APNs and Figure 6 for land application areas). The project site is in Sections 3 and 34, Township 9 South, Range 10 East, Mount Diablo Base and Meridian; 37°06'18.98"N, 120°52'2.91"W.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The existing active dairy facilities include approximately 1,171,940 square feet of roofed structures located on 282± acres of an existing farm. Existing dairy facilities are located on the north and south side of Henry Miller Avenue, east of Wilson Road and include the following:

- freestall barns and shades
- commodity barns
- calf barn
- residences
- shop
- loafing barns
- equipment yard
- scale
- exercise pens
- feed storage area
- milking parlor
- hospital milking parlor
- storage
- solids settling basins
- manure separating pad
- wastewater ponds
- dry manure storage area
- anaerobic digester
- tailwater pond
- mechanical separator

The project applicant currently operates a dairy facility under CUP 15-018 and heifer facility under CUP19-006 in Merced County. The existing dairy and heifer facilities house 5,171 mature cows (4,000 milking and 1,171 dry) and 3,030 support stock.

The existing dairy facility (APN 070-180-028) includes four freestall barns between 136,680 and 146,060 square feet, totaling approximately 562,800 square feet. The site includes four loafing barns totaling approximately 154,300 square feet, two commodity barns totaling 15,800 square feet, and a milking parlor (on APN 070-180-044), hospital milking parlor, storage (old milking parlor) and shop totaling 71,665 square feet. An existing residence is located along Wilson Road north of the scale and equipment yard. In addition to the milking parlor, APN 070-180-044 includes a manure separator pad, two solids settling basins, wastewater pond, and three residences along Wilson Road. APN 070-180-045 includes a dry manure storage area and anaerobic digester. APN 070-201-010 includes a tailwater pond.

The existing heifer facility (APN 081-020-028) includes two freestall barns and two loafing barns with sizes of approximately 99,680 square feet, 175,600 square feet, 38,860 square feet, and 51,375 square feet. An existing commodity barn is approximately 1,860 square feet. In total, the existing structures at the heifer facility comprise approximately 367,375 square feet of developed area, not including three existing residences. A mechanical solids separator and separator pad are currently installed and operating at the heifer facility (see Figure 4). A well is located on the northwest corner of the parcel. Development of these facilities removed a former area of open corrals and increased the developed area of the site by approximately six acres, located on cropped acreage managed by the Godinho Dairy. Grading was conducted for building pads and access roads, and approximately 15,000 cubic yards of fill were obtained from adjacent Godinho Dairy fields.

None of the existing buildings are located within 100 feet of the existing domestic wells on both sites. Several off-site residences are located within 1,000 feet of the existing heifer facilities; these distances reflect current conditions (see Figure 4 and Figures 7a through 7c).

Animal wastes from freestall and other concrete-surfaced areas are flushed to the on-site waste management system, while solid manure within corral areas is scraped. Liquid manure is directed to the wastewater storage ponds. Stormwater runoff from roofed areas is routed to adjacent fields. Wastewater is exported from the facility and applied to adjacent croplands.

Definition of the Project Site – For the purposes of this Initial Study, the “project site” refers to the area of active dairy facilities. The larger project also includes cropland associated with the dairy farm. Throughout this document, “project area” refers to all parcels that are part of the project, including the active dairy facilities and associated cropland.

Solid manure that accumulates within corrals is removed twice per year. Dry manure is stockpiled on site at the existing dry manure storage area. Dry manure is used for bedding or sold and hauled off site for use as fertilizer and soil amendments. As reported in the Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) for the heifer ranch, liquid and solid manure are trucked and/or piped to adjacent and non-adjacent fields. All land application areas are managed and reported under the Godinho Dairy NMP (see Figures 6a through 6d). While the exact location of off-site cropland parcels may vary, the disposal of manure at off-site locations and the acreage necessary to properly dispose of manure liquids and solids are accounted for in the project NMP. Figure 9 illustrates the processes that occur at a heifer farm.

Both facilities rely on existing utilities, including domestic water, stormwater, and electrical services. The existing septic systems are not affected by current operations.

Operations at the dairy production facility occur year-round. The herd is milked twice daily, and milk is collected and transported off site each day. Activity is present on the site nearly 24 hours a day, with the milking parlor operating for approximately 20 hours each day.

Operations at the heifer facility occur during primary operating hours of 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. when animals are fed, and from 3:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. when feed is pushed back into feed racks. The facility employs two workers, with up to five individuals on site once per week during veterinarian checks.

A future well will be located on the north side of the heifer facility near Johnson Road and the existing residence. It will serve as the replacement well for the older domestic well, providing water for residences and drinking water for the herd. This well was previously permitted with CUP19-006 but has not yet been constructed.

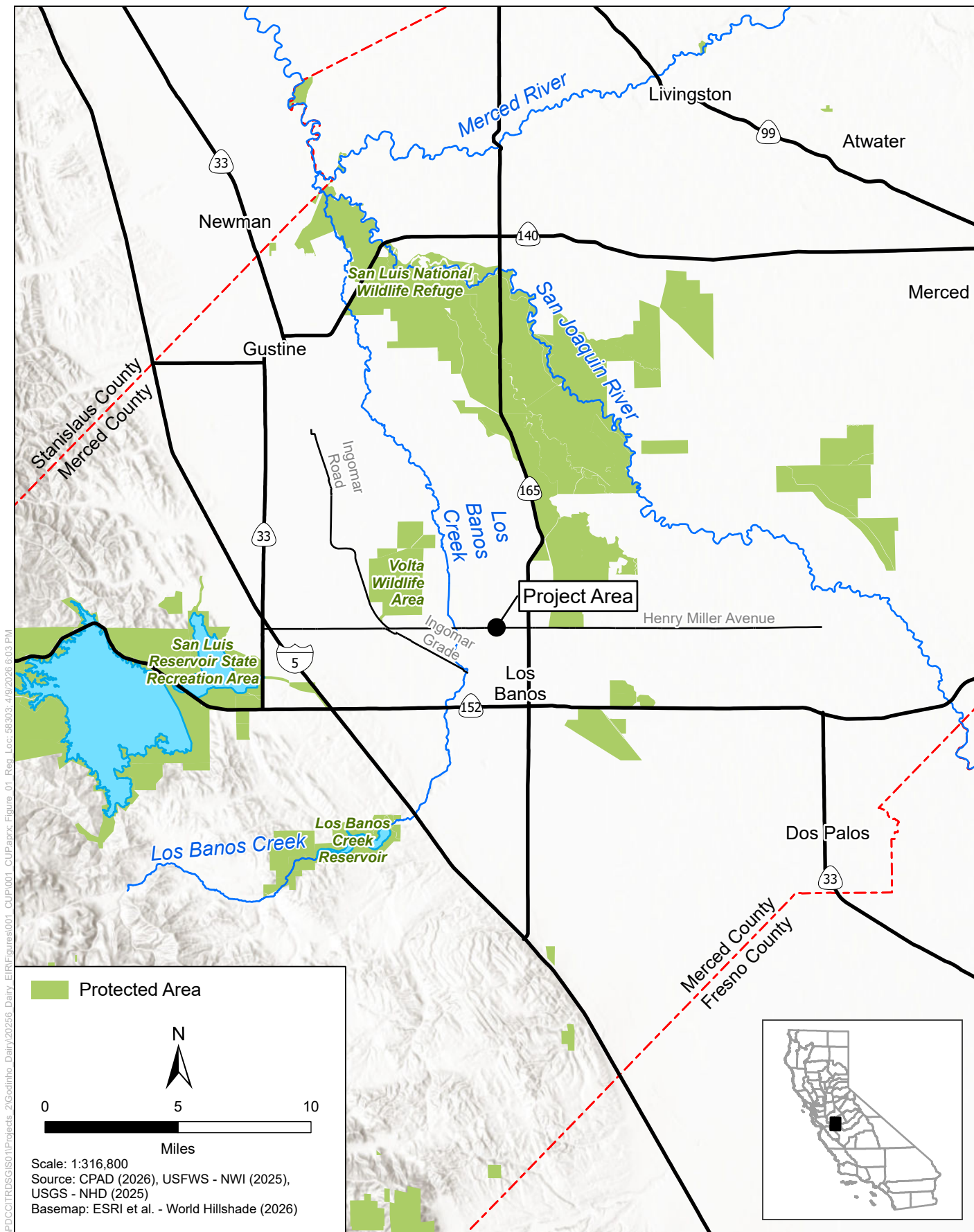


Figure 1
Regional Location



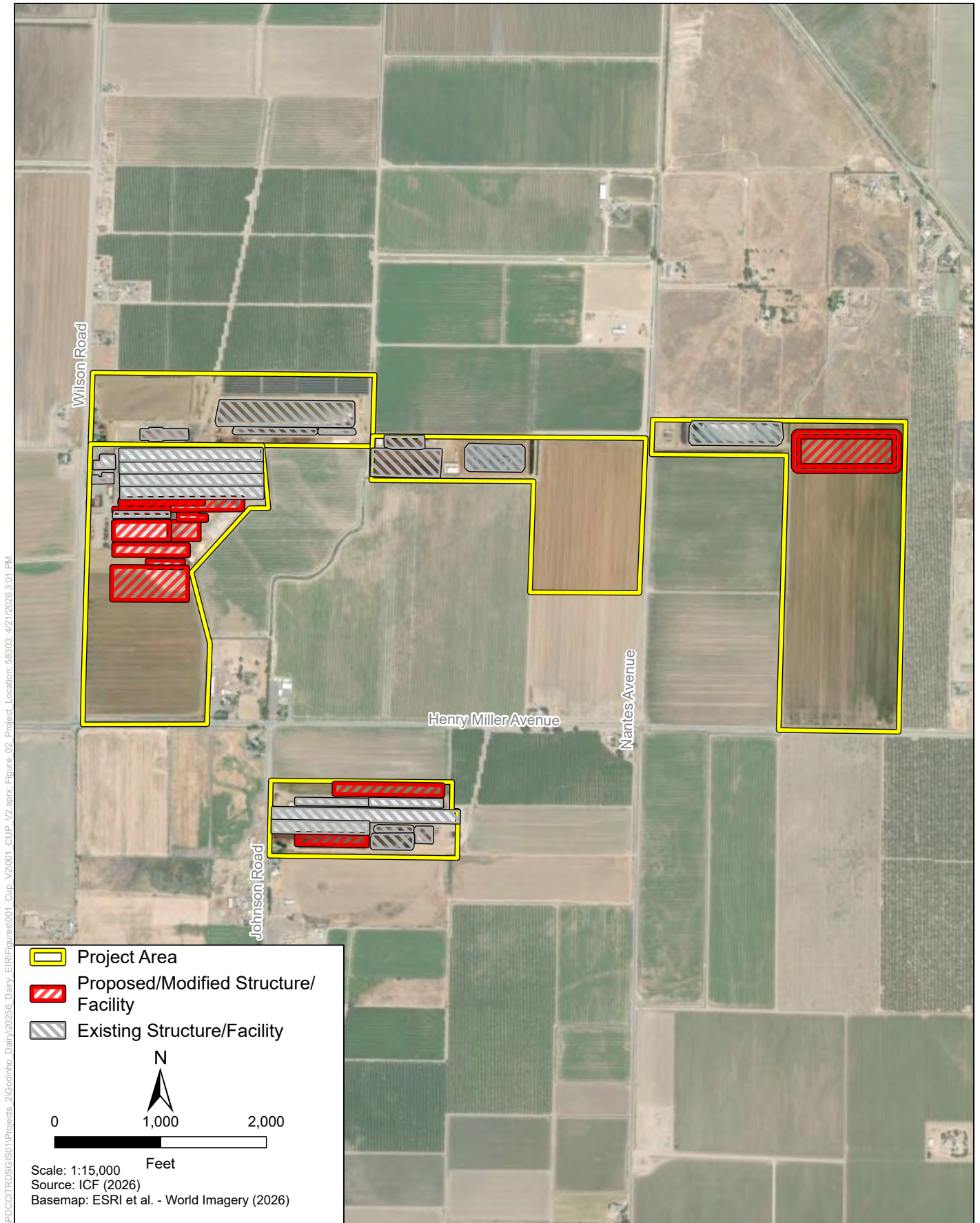


Figure 2
Project Location

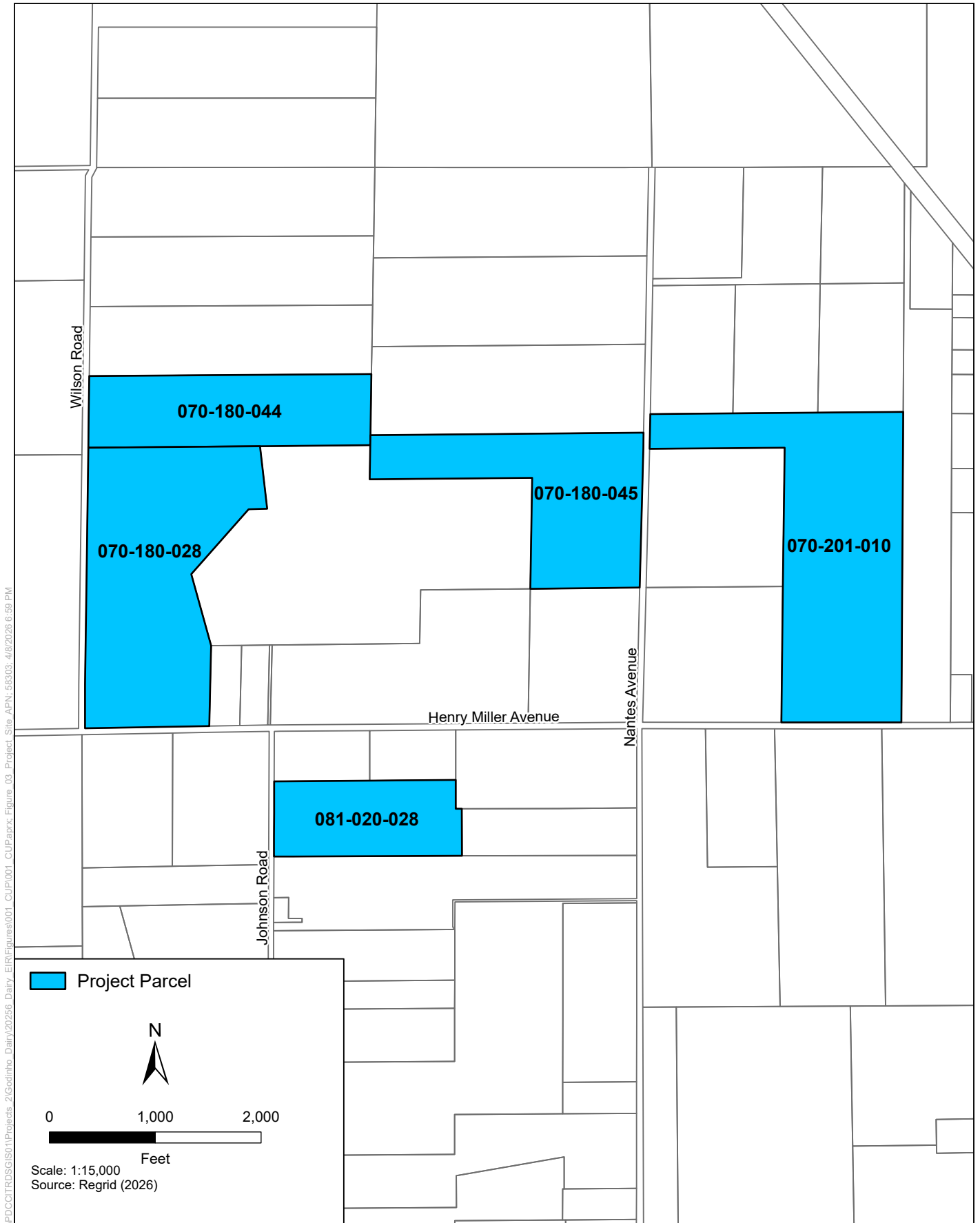


Figure 3
Project Site Merced County Assessor Parcel Numbers

The project site is located within Flood Zone X, which is defined as an area with an annual flooding probability of 0.2 percent, outside of the 100-year flood zone.

SURROUNDING LAND USES AND SETTING

There are off-site single-family residences surrounding the project site and located within the windshed of the heifer facilities (defined as an area of 1,320 feet upwind to 2,640 feet downwind of the periphery of the animal facility) (see Table 1 and Figure 4). The closest off-site residences are located directly across the street from the project on Wilson Road, Johnson Road and Henry Miller Avenue (see Figure 4 and Figures 7a through 7c). The applicant also owns cropland in the project area that is used for dairy facility operations.

Table 1. Surrounding Land Uses at the Godinho Dairy			
Location	Land Use	General Plan	Zoning
ON SITE	Dairy/Heifer Facilities/Residences	Agricultural	General Agricultural A-1
NORTH	Agriculture/Dairy/Residences	Agricultural	Exclusive Agricultural A-2
EAST	Agriculture/Residences	Agricultural	General Agricultural A-1
SOUTH	Agriculture/Residences/Animal Confinement Facility	Agricultural	General Agricultural A-1
WEST	Agriculture/Residences	Agricultural	General Agricultural A-1

Source: Project Applicant 2025; Google Earth 2026.

The city limits boundary of the City of Los Banos is located approximately 0.9 mile southeast of the Godinho Heifer Facility (APN 081-020-028). The Godinho Heifer Facility (APN 081-020-028) is located within the Planning Area and Area of Interest of the City of Los Banos; however, the Godinho Dairy portion of the project site (APN 070-180-028) is outside these boundaries. The project site is outside of the Grasslands Ecological Area but within the boundary of the Grasslands Focus Area. Project details such as adjacent land uses and cropping patterns could change over the course of evaluation, and from those existing at the time of this Initial Study. These changes, however, would consist of agricultural and ancillary uses consistent with the 2030 Merced County General Plan, and would not affect the analysis contained in this Initial Study.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

As required by State CEQA Guidelines Section 15124(b), the following discussion identifies the objectives of the proposed Godinho Dairy Expansion Project. These objectives describe the underlying purpose of the project and the goals the applicant seeks to achieve through the proposed dairy expansion. The project is intended to support the long-term viability, efficiency, and sustainability of the existing dairy operation while maintaining compliance with applicable regulatory requirements. The applicant has identified the following objectives:

- Maintain a modern, efficient, and economically viable dairy operation that remains competitive within California's dairy industry and operates in compliance with applicable federal, state, and local regulations.
- Expand existing dairy facilities and infrastructure to accommodate planned increases in herd size and improve the operational efficiency and productivity of the dairy.
- Maximize the productive use of land and facilities currently owned or controlled by the applicant, thereby supporting long-term agricultural operations and continued dairy production.
- Utilize available agricultural lands for feed crop production and nutrient management, including the beneficial reuse of dairy process water and nutrients at agronomic application rates, reducing reliance on imported fertilizers and supporting sustainable agricultural practices.
- Enhance manure management operations through the collection and generation of dry manure that may be land applied in accordance with regulatory requirements and/or marketed as a valuable agricultural soil amendment.
- Construct improvements that are technically feasible, economically practical, and capable of obtaining required permits and approvals within a reasonable timeframe.
- Support the long-term sustainability of agricultural uses in Merced County by maintaining and expanding a working dairy operation within an area designated and used for agricultural production.
- Provide and maintain year-round employment opportunities and associated economic benefits for local residents, recognizing that dairy operations provide permanent agricultural employment in contrast to many seasonal agricultural activities.

The objectives identified above will assist the County in developing a reasonable range of alternatives for evaluation in this EIR and will aid decision makers in preparing findings and, if necessary, a statement of overriding considerations, consistent with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15124(b).

PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

The project applicant has applied for a new Conditional Use Permit (CUP25-009) from Merced County to combine the existing dairy and heifer facilities and expand them from 5,171 mature cows (4,000 milking and 1,171 dry) and 3,030 support stock to 7,000 mature cows (6,000 milking and 1,000

dry) and 7,000 support stock (see Table 2). Considering the existing animals at both facilities, the proposed expansion would represent an increase of 5,499 animals from existing numbers.

Table 2. Existing and Proposed Herd at the Godinho Dairy

	Milk Cows	Dry Cows	Bred Heifers (15–24 mo.)	Heifers (7–14 mo.)	Calves (4–6 mo.)	Calves (0–3 mo.)	Total Animals
Existing NMP	4,000	700	0	0	0	0	4,700
Proposed NMP	6,000	1,000	2,000	2,000	1,500	1,500	14,000
Change	2,000	300	2,000	2,000	1,500	1,500	9,300

Note: This evaluation considers maximum buildout.

Source: Existing Conditions Nutrient Management Plan-Proposed Revision 2019; Nutrient Management Plan-Proposed Revision 2025.

The proposed project would include the construction of approximately 427,850 square feet of supporting buildings and structures at the existing dairy and heifer facilities (see Figures 5a through 5c). However, 184,100 square feet of this total is already entitled with the existing CUPs for the dairy and heifer facilities; therefore, the proposed project represents a net increase in buildings and structures of approximately 243,750 square feet, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Construction Square-Footage at the Godinho Dairy

	Total Square Feet
Supporting Buildings and Structures	
Two (2) freestall barns	225,050
Two (2) loafing barns	112,700
One (1) calf barn	70,000
Additional Construction Elements	
One (1) feed storage area (concrete pad area, no structure)	219,170
One (1) wastewater retention pond	247,500
Changes to Project Square Footage	
Total additional construction	427,850
Existing building removal	-59,000
Area covered by existing CUPs	-184,100
Net Change	243,750

One of the proposed freestall barns and one loafing barn would be located at the facilities east of Wilson Road and one freestall barn and one loafing barn would be located at the heifer facility off Johnson Road. At the dairy facility, the existing southerly loafing barn would be extended an additional 46,200 square feet. Immediately south of that would be the new calf bar, followed by the commodity barn and then the feed storage area. All barns would consist of a concrete foundation, and steel beam supports with corrugated metal roofs. Freestall barns would include concrete lanes for animal access and flushing with individual stalls for each animal. Loafing barns would have concrete lanes for animal access and flushing. The milking parlor walls would be constructed with concrete masonry unit blocks. See Figures 5a through 5c for the proposed dairy site plan and replacement well. The project also includes plans for a new feed storage area covering approximately 219,170 square feet. This area will consist of a concrete slab specifically designed for feed storage.

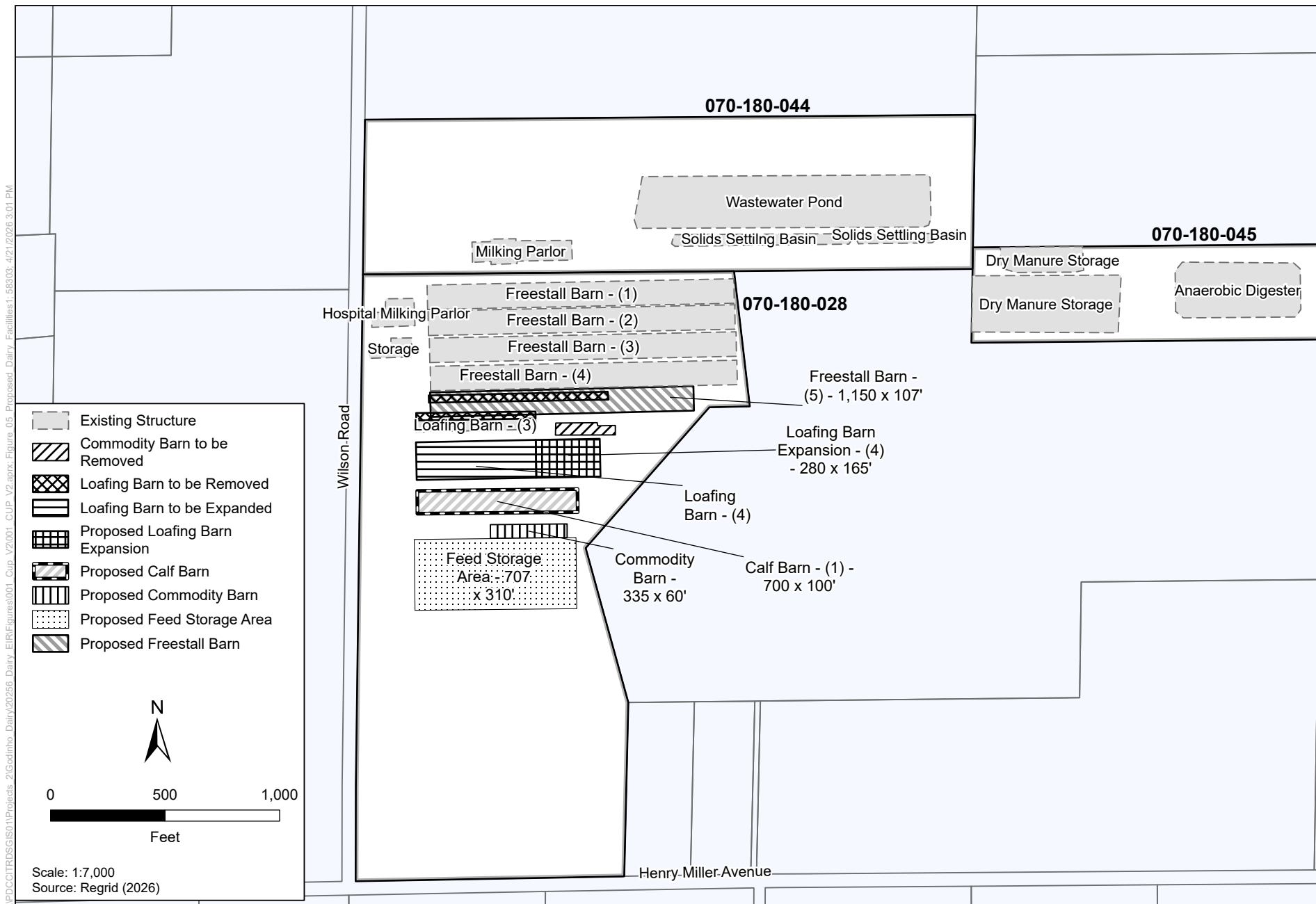


Figure 5a
 Proposed Dairy Facilities - North of Henry Miller Avenue - Part 1
 Page 1 of 3

\\PDC\OTRDS\GIS\Projects_2\Codinho Dairy\20256 Dairy_EIR\Figure001 Cup_V20001 CUP_V2.aprx Figure 05 Proposed Dairy Facilities1.58303; 4/21/2026 3:01 PM

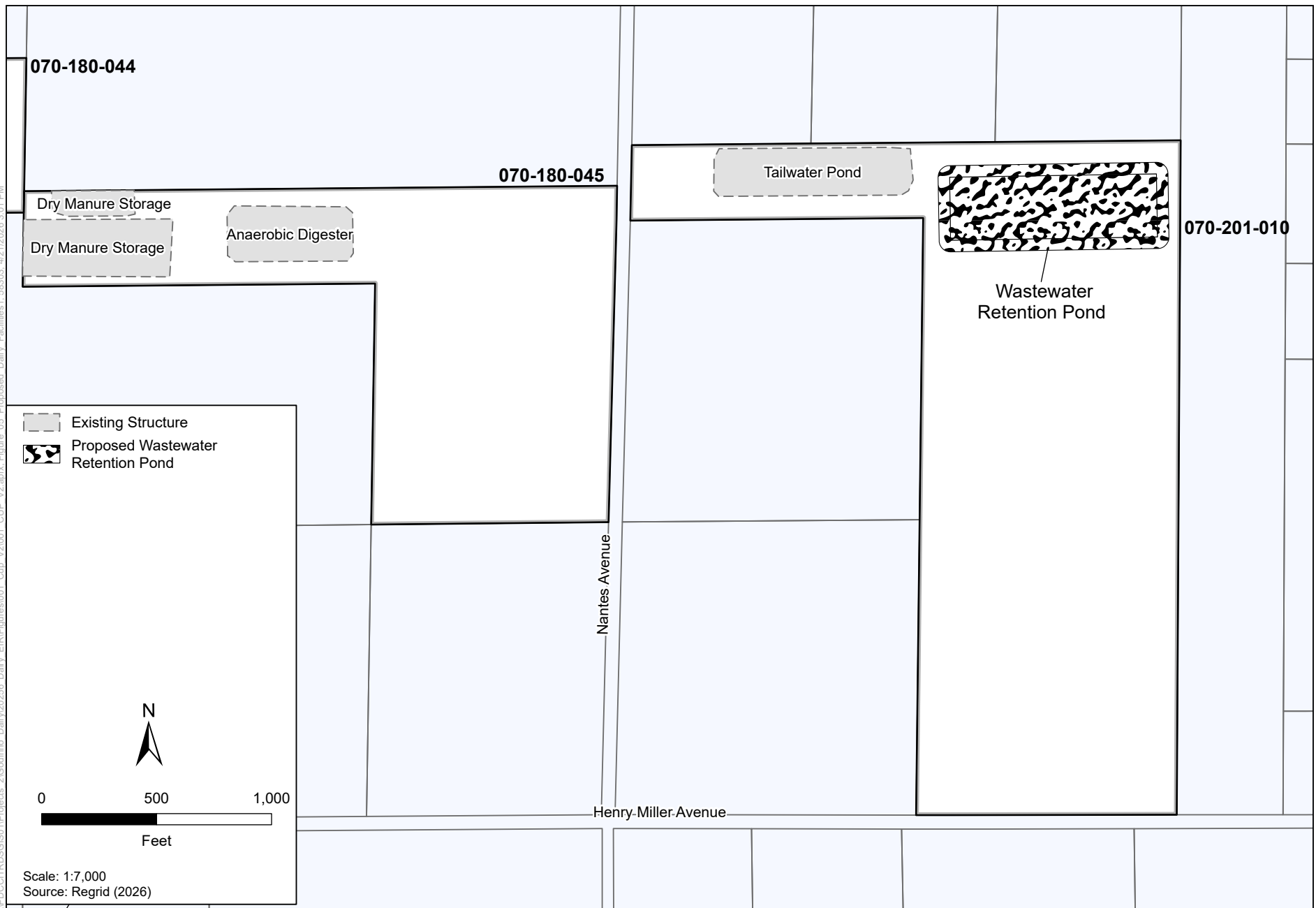


Figure 5b
Proposed Dairy Facilities - North of Henry Miller Avenue - Part 2
Page 2 of 3

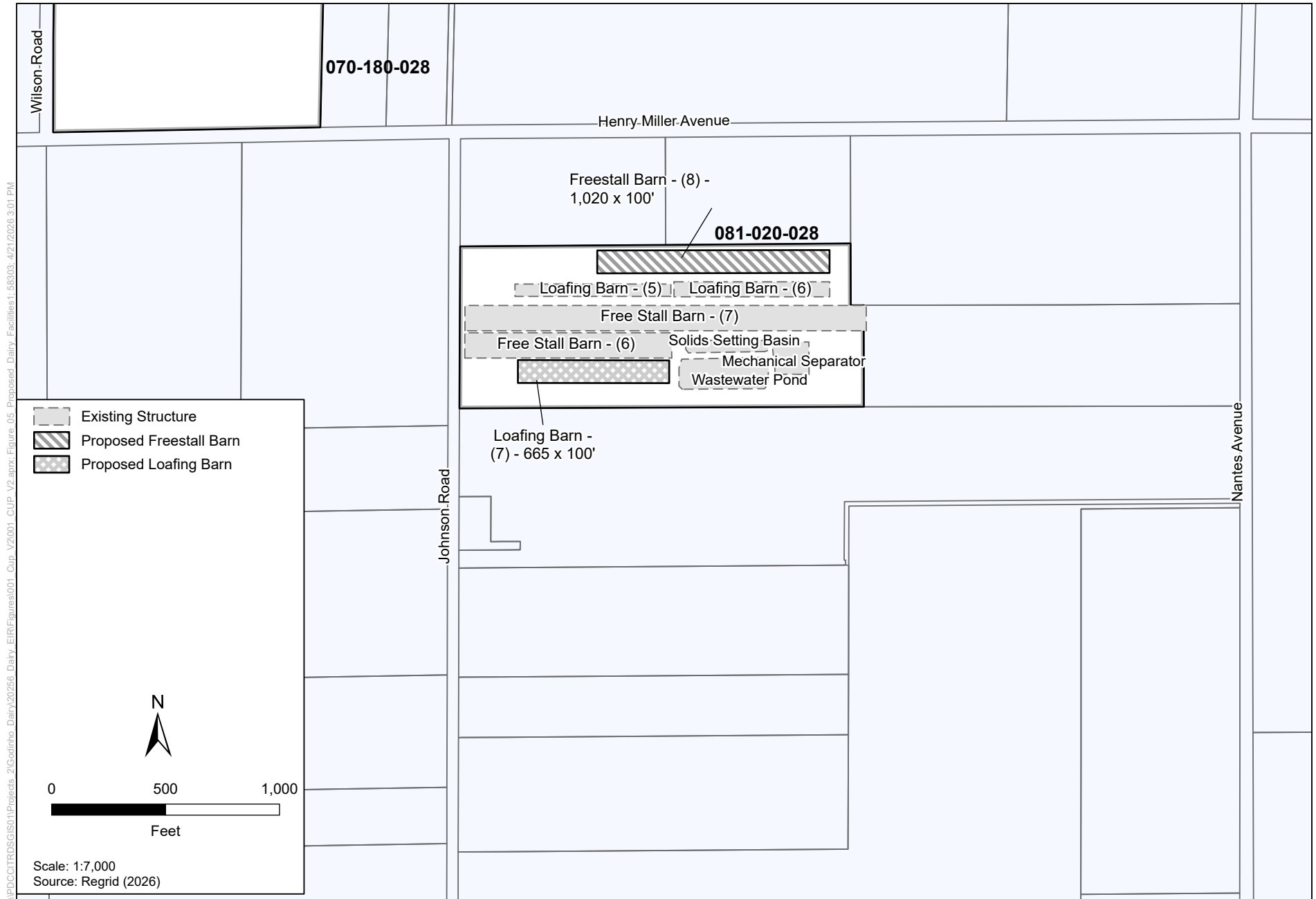


Figure 5c
 Proposed Dairy Facilities - South of of Henry Miller Avenue
 Page 3 of 3

Construction of the proposed facilities would result in the conversion of approximately 5.0 acres of cropland for the proposed feed storage area east of Wilson Road and north of Henry Miller Avenue). The project would include a new wastewater retention pond on APN 070-201-010. See Table 4 and Figures 6a through 6d for proposed cropland conditions. Crops grown on site would continue to be used for dairy feed crops and supplement imported grain and hay. All other new development would occur within the existing production area (i.e., new freestall barns and loafing barns) or would not remove cropland.

Table 4. Existing Conditions: Godinho Dairy Project Parcels, Acreage, Crops, Ownership and Nutrients Applied

APN	Field Id	Cropped Acreage ¹	Crops Grown	Owned by Dairy Owner or Rented	Nutrients Applied ²
070-180-028	1	27	Rye/Sudan	XX	WW
070-180-044	2	8	Oats/Sudan	XX	WW
070-180-045	5/6	60	Rye/Sudan	XX	WW
070-180-050	-	-	-	-	-
078-130-015	7	156	Alfalfa	XX	SM
078-130-015	8	18	Alfalfa	XX	SM
078-130-060	9	108	Wheat/Corn	XX	SM
070-201-010	10	77	Trit/Sudan	XX	WW
070-190-007	11	40	Oats/Corn	XX	SM
070-180-021	12N	27	Rye/Sudan	XX	WW
070-180-021	12S	43	Wheat/Sudan	XX	WW
081-020-019	13	40	Wheat/Corn	XX	WW
081-020-008					
070-180-009	14	61	Rye/Sudan	XX	WW
070-180-008					
070-201-011	E1	38	Oats/Corn	XX	WW
070-201-009	E2	39	Oats/Corn	Rented	WW
070-100-008	Fahey1	111	Oats/Corn	XX	SM
070-100-029	Fahey2	165	Oats/Corn	XX	WW
070-100-030					
070-090-035	Fahey3	108	Oats/Corn	XX	SM
070-090-036	-	-	-	-	-
070-160-055	JM1	80	Wheat/Corn	Rented	SM
070-160-055	JM2	80	Wheat/Corn	Rented	SM
070-160-040	JM3	60	Oats/Corn	XX	SM
070-160-041					
070-160-039					
070-160-034					
070-160-034	JM4	65	Oats/Corn	XX	SM
070-160-032					
070-180-002	JM5	65	Trit/Corn	Rented	SM
Total		1,476			

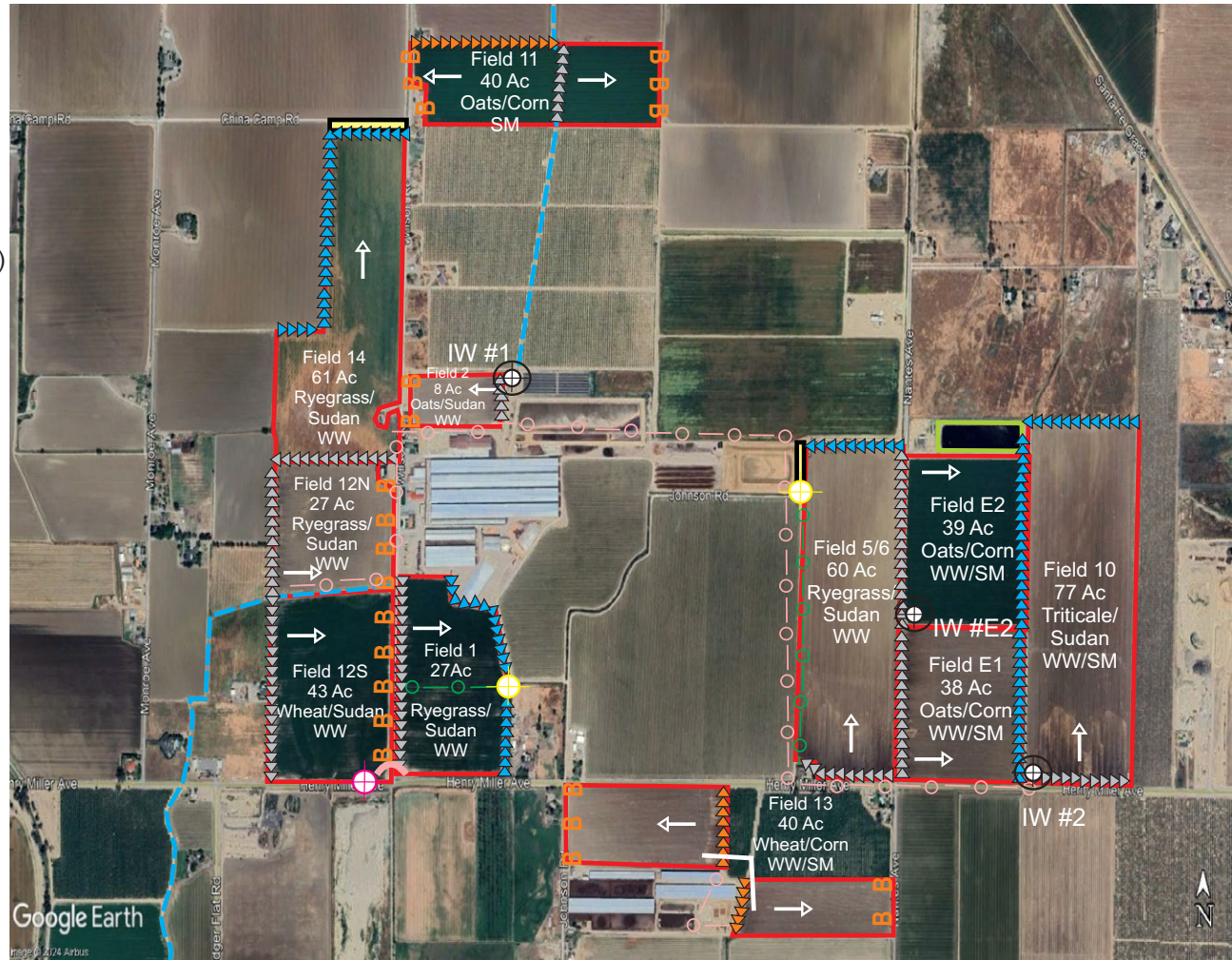
Notes: APN = Assessor's Parcel Number. WW = wastewater. DM = Dry Manure. XX = Owned.

- 1 Approximate acreages. Cropped acreage is based on the Existing Conditions NMP dated 2025. Nutrients may not be applied to the gross acreage of the parcel listed, but only the cropped acreage listed.
- 2 The existing NMP cited irrigation sources include CCID surface water and freshwater pond. In addition, the NMP materials indicate liquid manure is applied to most cropped fields, but both liquid and/or solid manure can be applied at the dairy operator's discretion as long as nutrient planning targets are met.

Source: Cardoso Ag Services, 2025.

Legend:

- Field Boundary
- Freshwater Pond
- Tailwater Pond
- Wastewater Pipeline
- Irrigation Pipeline (FW & WW)
- CCID Canal
- Tailwater Pipeline
- Flow Direction
- <<<<<< Tail Water Flow
- >>>>>> Earthen Irrigation Ditch
- <<<<<< Concrete Irrigation Ditch
- ⊙ Pump
- ⊙ Tail Water Pump
- ⊙ Irrigation Well with Setback
- ⊙ Tile Drain Pump
- B Berm
- ⤿ Culvert



3382 Ft.

Scale

Source: Cardoso Ag Services 2025

Figure 6a
Proposed Land Application Areas—Field Map 1, Existing



Legend:

- Field Boundary
- - - Freshwater Pipeline
- - - CCID Canal
- Tailwater Pond Recovery
- Flow Direction
- ▤▤▤▤ Concrete Irrigation Ditch
- ▤▤▤▤ Tailwater
- ⊙ Pump
- S Screw Gate

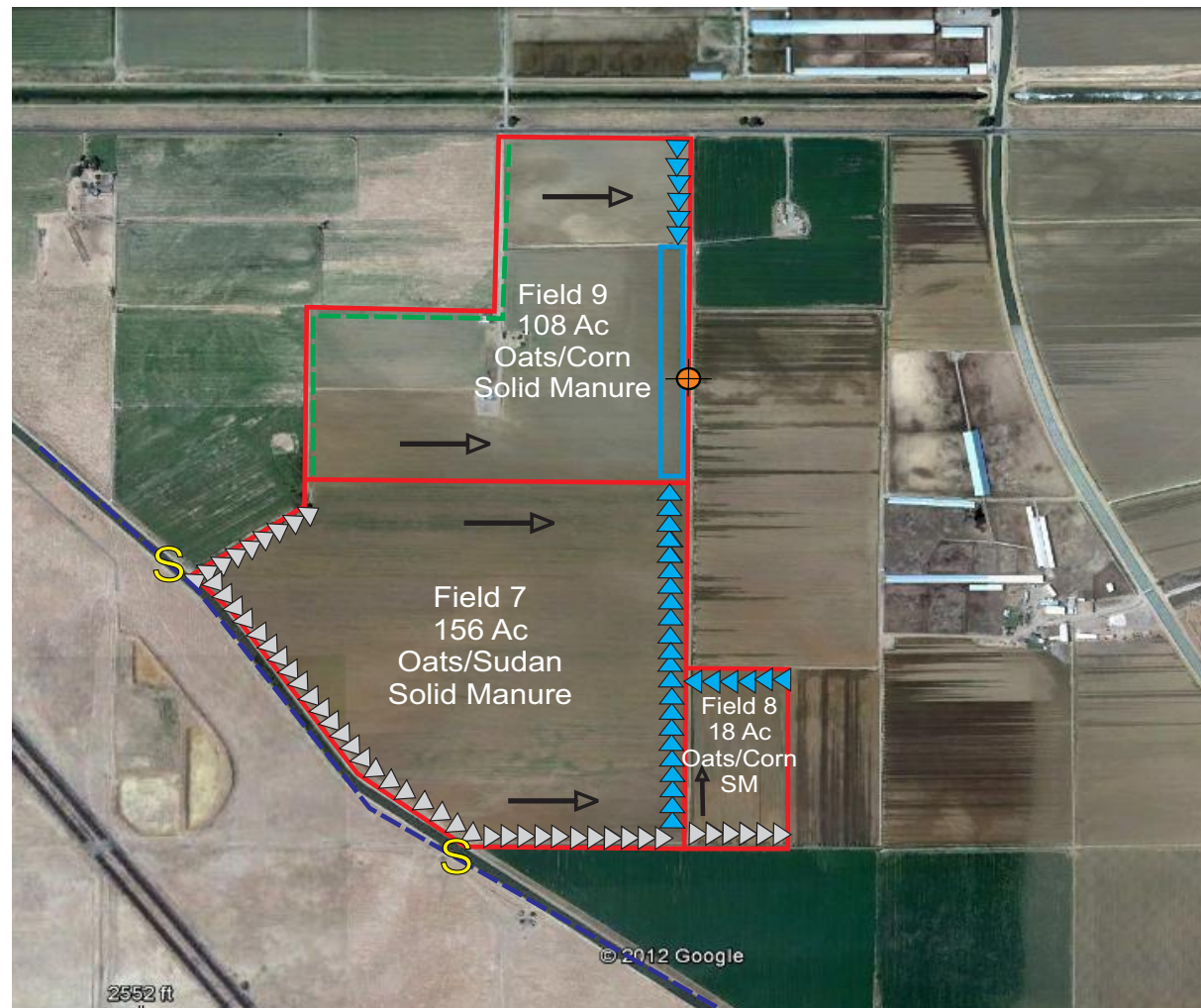
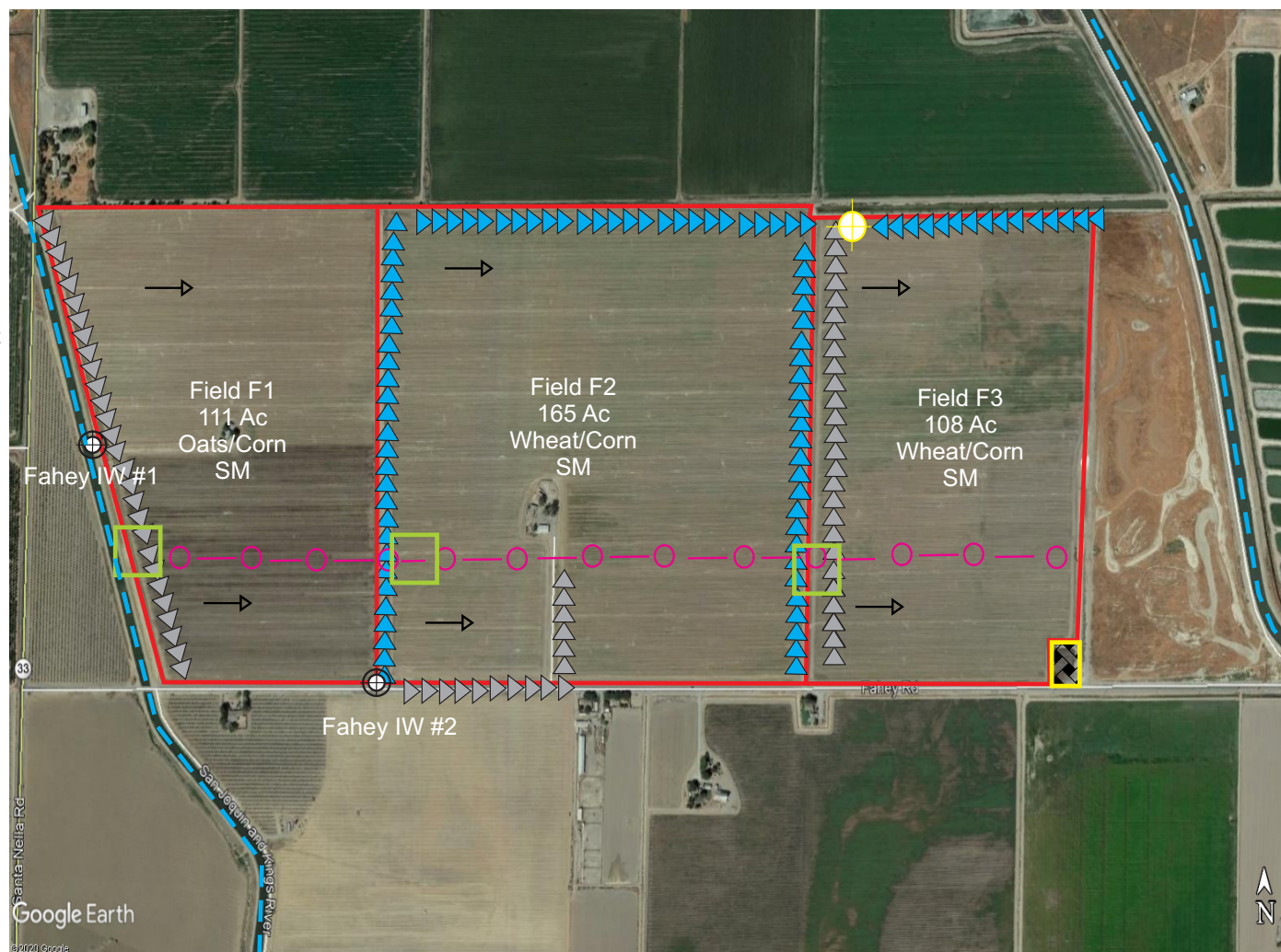


Figure 6b
Proposed Land Application Areas—Field Map 2, Existing

Legend:

- Field Boundary
- Canal
- Flow Direction
- <<<< Tailwater Flow
- >>>> Irrigation Ditch
- ⊕ Irrigation Well w/ 100ft non app setback
- ⊕ Tailwater Pump
- Freshwater Pipeline
- Box
- ◼ Earthen Manure Storage



1742 Ft.

Scale

Source: Cardoso Ag Services 2025



Figure 6c
Proposed Land Application Areas—Field Map 3

Legend:

- Field Boundary
- ➔ Flow Direction
- ▤▤▤▤ Concrete Irrigation Ditch
- ▤▤▤▤ Earthen Irrigation Ditch
- ⊕ Irrigation Well w/ Setback
- V Freshwater Valve
- D Drain



Source: Cardoso Ag Services 2025



Figure 6d
Proposed Land Application Areas—Field Map 4, Existing

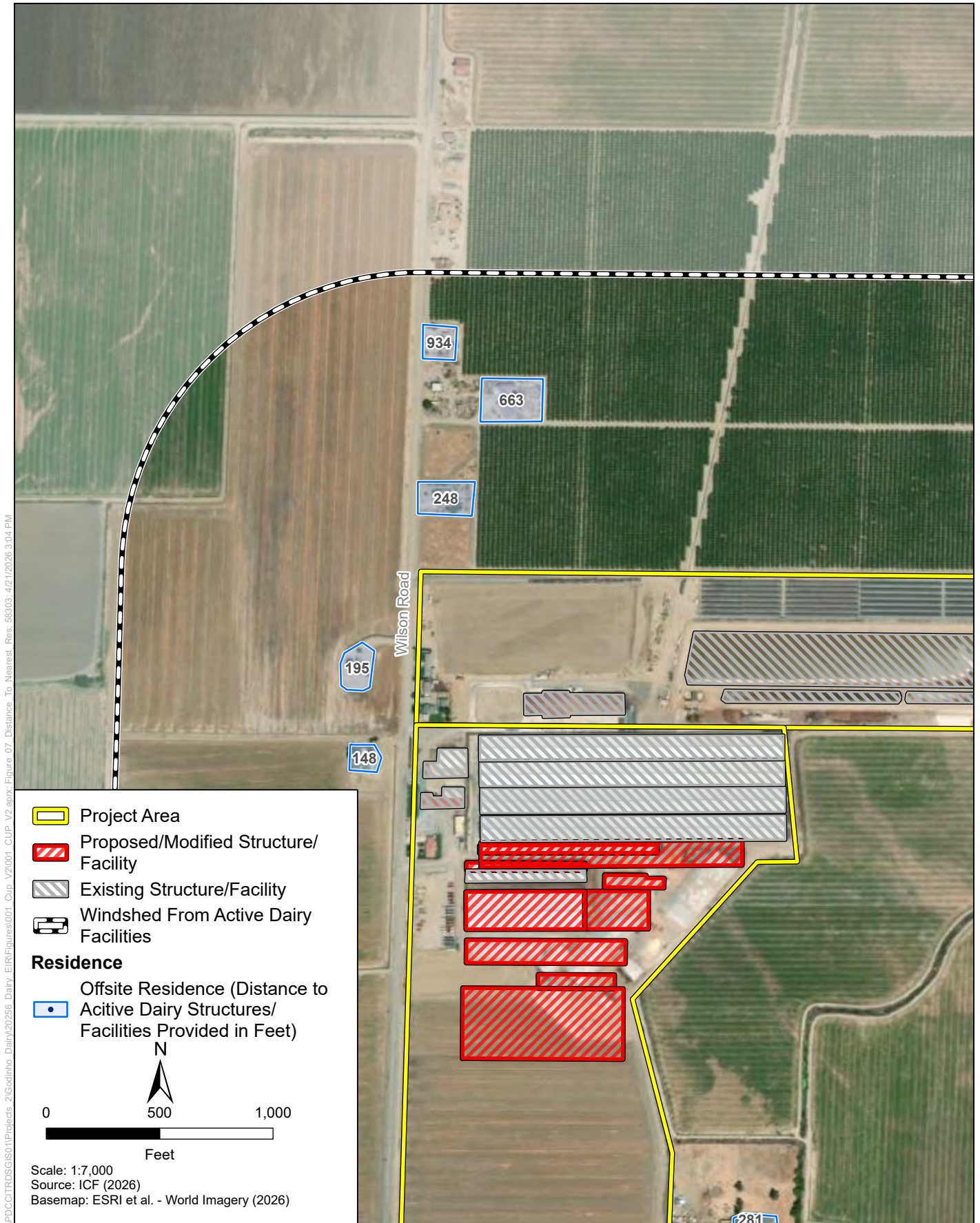


Figure 7a
 Distance of Nearest Off-site Residences to
 Existing and Proposed Active Dairy Facilities

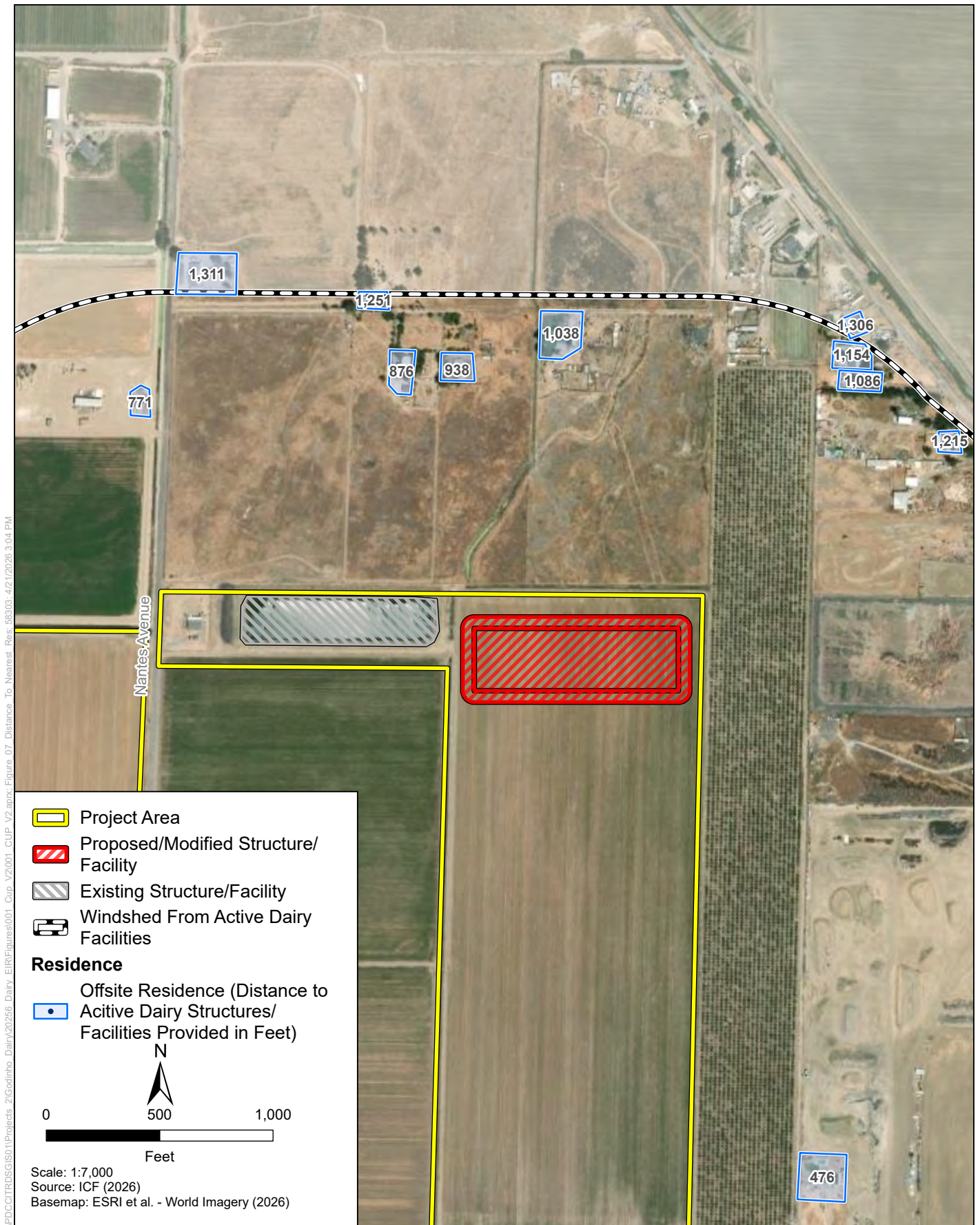


Figure 7b
Distance of Nearest Off-site Residences to Existing and Proposed Active Dairy Facilities

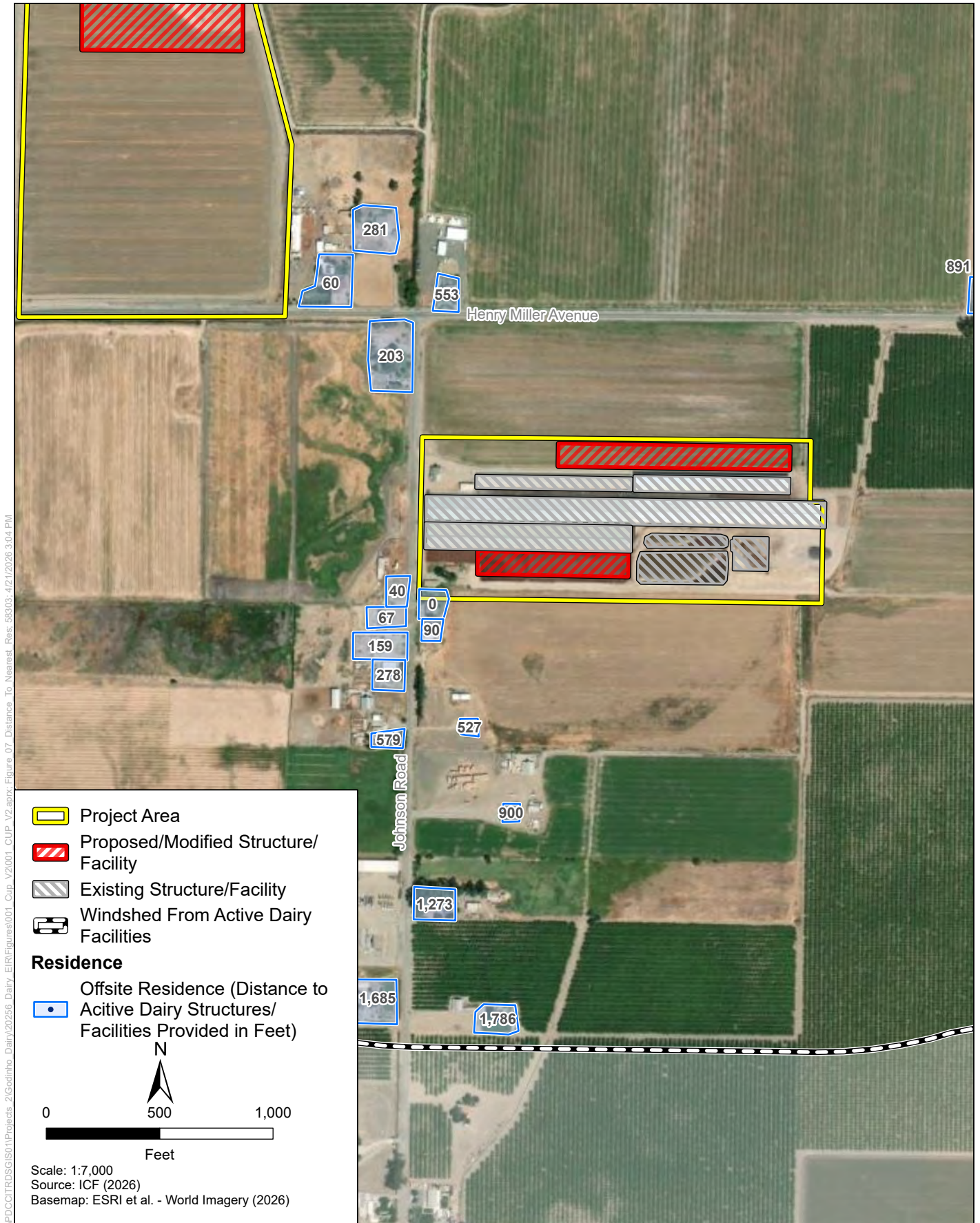


Figure 7c
Distance of Nearest Off-site Residences to
Existing and Proposed Active Dairy Facilities

Animal waste from freestall and other concrete-surfaced areas would continue to be flushed to the existing on-site waste management system, except for solid manure within corral areas, which would continue to be scraped. Liquid manure would continue to be directed to the wastewater storage pond.

Stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces and roofed areas would continue to be routed to the adjacent fields. Wastewater would continue to be exported from the facility and applied to adjacent cropland.

Solid manure that accumulates within corrals would continue to be removed two times per year. For the heifer facility expansion, dry manure would continue to be stockpiled on site at the existing dry manure storage area. Dry manure would be used for bedding or sold and hauled off site for use as fertilizer and soil amendments. As reported in the NMP for the existing dairy, liquid and solid manure would be trucked and/or piped to adjacent fields and non-adjacent fields. All land application areas are managed and reported under the Godinho Dairy NMP. While the exact location of these off-site cropland parcels may vary throughout operations, the disposal of manure at off-site locations and the acreage necessary to properly dispose of manure liquids and solids are accounted for in the project NMP. Figure 8 shows cross-sections of a freestall dairy barn, calf barn, loafing barn, and commodity barn and Figure 9 illustrates the processes that occur at a dairy farm.

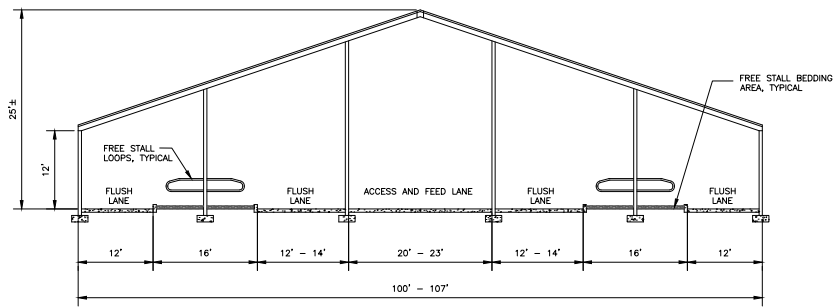
The dairy facility uses and stores diesel fuel, motor oil, hydraulic oil, and other petroleum products associated with the operation of heavy equipment. The dairy facility also uses and stores cleaning and maintenance materials that may be categorized as hazardous. The Hazardous Material Business Plan (HMBP) prepared for this facility will be updated to reflect the types and quantities of these materials.

The proposed dairy and heifer facility expansion would rely on existing utilities, including domestic water, stormwater, and electrical services. Electricity is provided by PG&E and solar panels on the project site. The project includes new building-mounted, dusk to dawn lighting on proposed structures.

The project applicant has prepared a Vector Control Plan in accordance with Animal Confinement Ordinance (ACO) Chapter 18.64.060. While an Odor Control Plan has not yet been prepared for this project, it is a requirement of the ACO.

Operations at the dairy would continue to occur 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, with most operations concentrated during daylight hours. There are currently as many as 20 full-time employees on site at one time with the existing dairy operation. With the expansion proposed by this Conditional Use Permit, the number of employees is expected to remain the same.

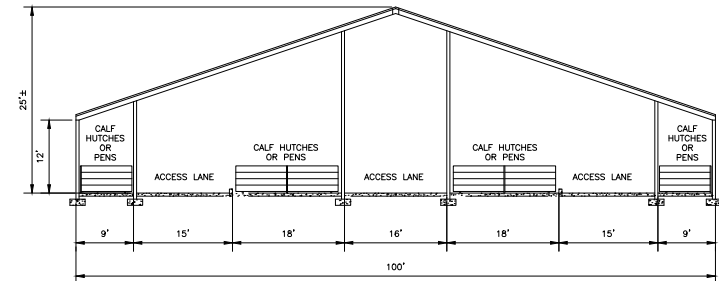
The existing dairy operation produces wholesale milk which is sold and shipped to an off-site creamery for processing. No customers visit the site, and no retail sales are made on the site. Including suppliers, vendors, and other visitors, an average of one and a peak of five visitors are anticipated to be on site at any time.



100' - 107' FREE STALL BARN END ELEVATION

NO SCALE

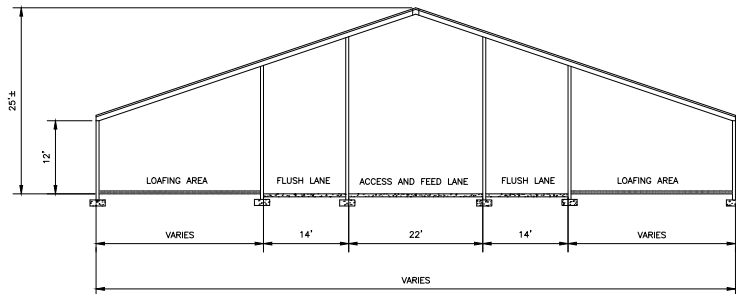
NOTE: FEATURES AND DIMENSIONS SHOWN ARE CONCEPTUAL ONLY. DETAILS MAY DIFFER AT THE TIME OF BUILDING DEPARTMENT SUBMITTAL.



CALF BARN END ELEVATION

NO SCALE

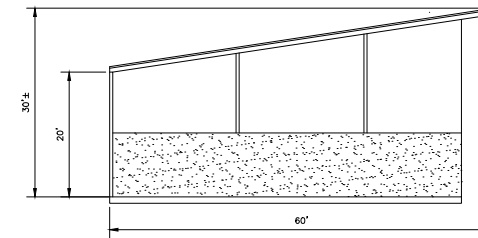
NOTE: FEATURES AND DIMENSIONS SHOWN ARE CONCEPTUAL ONLY. DETAILS MAY DIFFER AT THE TIME OF BUILDING DEPARTMENT SUBMITTAL.



LOAFING BARN END ELEVATION

NO SCALE

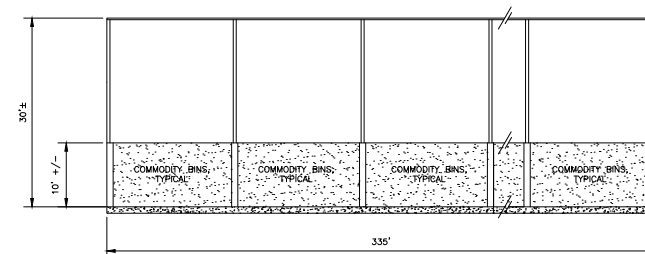
NOTE: FEATURES AND DIMENSIONS SHOWN ARE CONCEPTUAL ONLY. DETAILS MAY DIFFER AT THE TIME OF BUILDING DEPARTMENT SUBMITTAL.



COMMODITY BARN END ELEVATION

NO SCALE

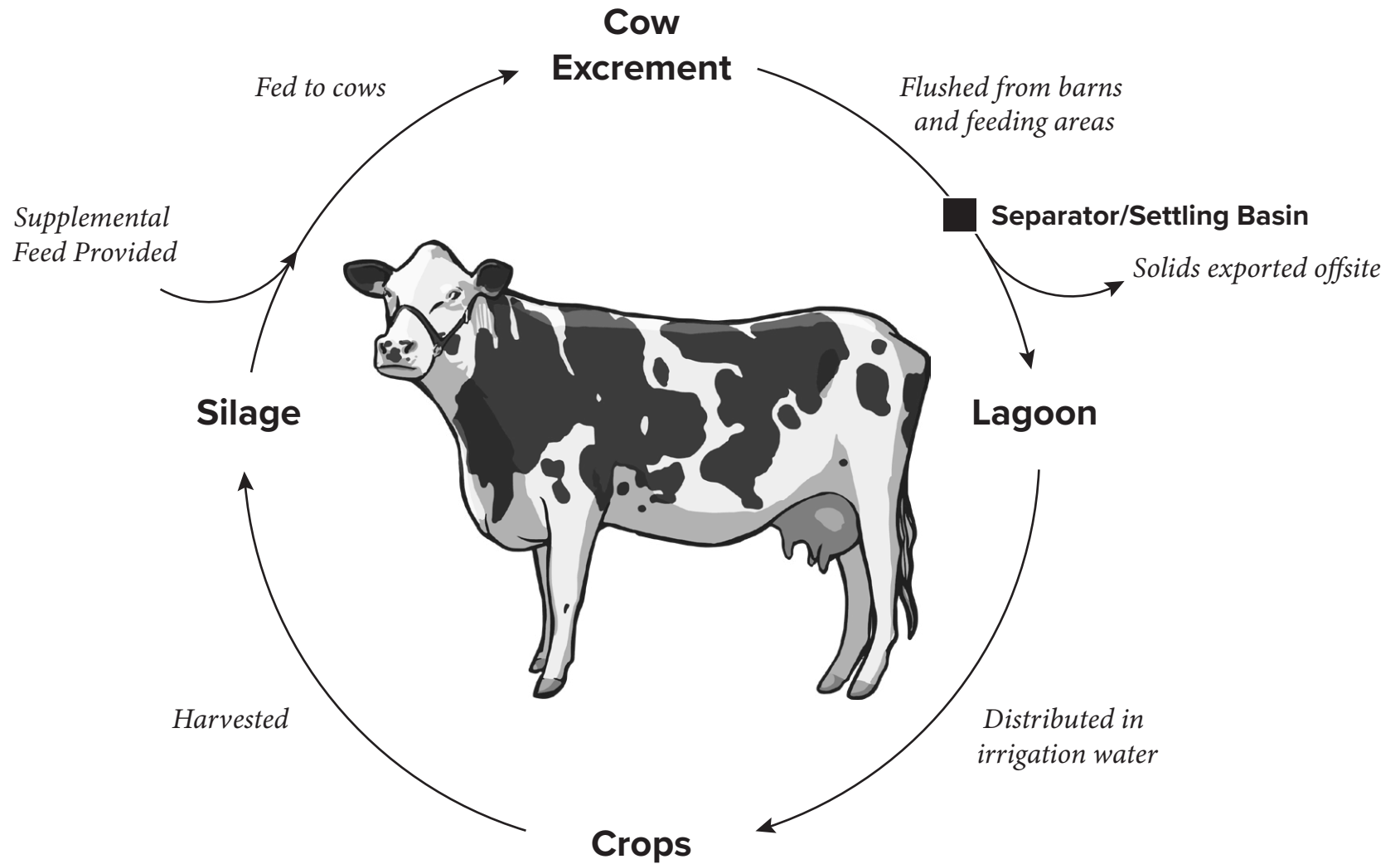
NOTE: FEATURES AND DIMENSIONS SHOWN ARE CONCEPTUAL ONLY. DETAILS MAY DIFFER AT THE TIME OF BUILDING DEPARTMENT SUBMITTAL.



COMMODITY BARN FRONT (NORTH) ELEVATION

NO SCALE

NOTE: FEATURES AND DIMENSIONS SHOWN ARE CONCEPTUAL ONLY. DETAILS MAY DIFFER AT THE TIME OF BUILDING DEPARTMENT SUBMITTAL.



Source: Merced County 2023. Image: Wikicommons / NIAID, Ryan Kissinger.

Circulation and Parking

The project site would continue to be served by heavy trucks (milk tankers, commodity deliveries), and other vehicles. It is estimated that the proposed project will generate approximately 71 average daily trips. This estimate includes milk truck trips, feed truck delivery trips, support stock transport trips, veterinary service trips, tallow service trips, employee trips, and seasonal trips for nutrient application and harvesting (see Table 5). The majority of trips would consist of auto and light truck trips. All trips would continue to Johnson Road and Henry Miller Avenue. There is parking provided on site at both facilities.

Table 5. Godinho Dairy Expansion Project Trip Generation and Assignment

Trip Type/Purpose	Type of Vehicle	Trip Distance	Daily Trips		Local Route of Trip
			Existing	With Project	
On Site Residential Dwellings/Employees ¹	Auto/Light Truck	+/- 5 miles	40	40	Wilson Road/Johnson Road
Milk Trucks	Heavy Truck	15 miles one way	5	6	Wilson Road/Johnson Road
Feed Delivery Trucks	Heavy Truck	20 miles one way	3	3	Wilson Road/Johnson Road
Support Stock Transport Trucks	Medium Truck	1 mile one way	1	1	Wilson Rd/Johnson Rd
Veterinary Service Vehicles	Medium Truck	5 miles one way	0.1	0.1	Wilson Rd/Johnson Rd
Tallow Service Vehicles	Medium Truck	30 miles one way	0.1	0.1	Wilson Rd/Johnson Rd
Nutrient Application & Harvesting ²	Heavy Truck	+/- 3 miles one way	17.3	20.5	Wilson Rd/Johnson Rd
Total Auto/Light Truck Trips			40	40	
Total Medium Truck Trips			1.2	1.2	
Total Heavy Truck Trips			25.3	29.5	
Total Trips			66.5	70.7	

Notes: Trip Generation table based on ICF assumptions and information obtained from project applicant.

1 There are seven existing residences located on both sites, all of which are occupied by employees; therefore, a trip generation factor of 2 trips per day was used for both on-site residences and off-site employees.

2 Existing includes manure spreading 900 trips per year and harvest 5,400 trips per year; With Project includes manure spreading 1,000 trips per year and harvest 6,500 trips per year.

Source: ICF 2026; Project Applicant 2026.

PROJECT CONSTRUCTION AND PHASING

The construction schedule will depend on the timing of permit issuance and market conditions. The proposed improvements are planned to be constructed, and the proposed herd expansion is expected to begin within five years of issuance of a Conditional Use Permit. Buildout of the proposed improvements and the herd expansion will take place in phases between the years 2029 and 2033.

Construction equipment would include scrapers/graders, water trucks, mini-excavator, D10 dozer, construction crew pickups, concrete trucks, material delivery trucks, and scissor lifts. Existing access

roads and driveways are adequate for construction. No temporary driveways or access roads are anticipated.

Construction of the five animal housing structures, the commodity barn, the feed storage area, and a new wastewater retention pond will be considered as eight separate projects being constructed at separate times with no schedule overlap. Each project will have an average duration of 4 months at 20.5 working days per month, or a total of 82 working days per project. For trips estimated on a weekly basis, each project will have a duration of 16 weeks.

The total soil material imported (fill) for the demolition, freestall barns, loafing barns, calf barn, commodity barn, feed storage area and wastewater retention pond is approximately 251,900 cubic yards and the total soil material exported/excavated is approximately 35,800 cubic yards. The total area to be paved for the freestall barns, loafing barns, calf barn, and commodity barn is approximately 647,020 square feet.

PROJECT OPERATIONS AND PERMITTING HISTORY

There are no Merced County permits for the existing animal confinement facility. There are several permits on file for existing onsite residences, including CUP2575 for a mobile home, approved by the Planning Commission on March 11, 1981; AA00076 permitting a second and third residence, approved on August 22, 2000; and Conditional Use Permit No. CUP19-006 (May 27, 2020) to bring the Heifer Dairy into compliance with state regulations and expand the total herd size for the dairy from 1,103 Animal Units to 2,123 Animal Units. The project NMP indicates that the facility has been in operation since 1975.

Historically, the facility was operated as a small dairy with approximately 300 milk cows and 500 total head. The project applicant purchased the facility in 2009 and began housing heifers and support stock on the facility. The milking parlor that was part of the original dairy operation has been demolished, and the facility currently has no capacity or ability to milk cows.

To allow for the expansion of the heifer facility, the applicant submitted an application for issuance of a new Conditional Use Permit (CUP19-006) from the County. The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB) and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD) both regulate the existing heifer facility. As responsible agencies, they are required to use the County's environmental document in their consideration of the proposed dairy and heifer facilities expansion.

Historically, heifer facilities have not been regulated by the state, and there are generally limited records for these facilities. On June 8, 2017, the CVRWQCB adopted the Waste Discharge Requirements General Order for Confined Bovine Operations, Order R5-2107-0058 (Bovine Feedlot Order). The Bovine Feedlot Order obligated owners and operators of existing bovine feedlots within the Central Valley to submit a Notice of Intent as application for regulatory coverage under the Order, by July 1, 2018. Facilities that house 100 or more Animal Units require full coverage under the Bovine Feedlot Order. The project applicant submitted a Notice of Intent for the heifer ranch in June 2018.

There is an existing Permit to Operate (PTO) for the heifer facility, Permit No. N-9603-1-1. A Conservation Management Plan (CMP) to the SJVAPCD is required because the nutrients from the heifer facility are sent to cropland associated with the existing dairy.

REGULATORY COMPLIANCE AUDIT

The Merced County Community and Economic Development Department requests regulatory compliance audits of expanding animal confinement facilities from the Division of Environmental Health as part of the CUP evaluation process prior to project approval. The Merced County Division of Environmental Health (DEH) staff evaluated the facility for compliance with the Merced County ACO (Merced County Code Chapter 18.64). The DEH concluded that the heifer facility was in substantial compliance with the requirements of the ACO (letter dated October 7, 2019).

ESTABLISHING THE PROPER “BASELINE” FOR THE PROPOSED DAIRY EXPANSION

To determine whether an impact is significant, a “baseline” set of environmental conditions is required against which agencies can assess the significance of project impacts. As established by CEQA Guidelines Section 15125(a), the existing environmental setting, usually established at the time a Notice of Preparation is issued, should normally constitute the baseline. In this case, “the impacts of a proposed project are ordinarily to be compared to the actual environmental conditions existing at the time of CEQA analysis, rather than to allowable conditions defined by a plan or regulatory framework” (*Communities for a Better Environment v. South Coast Air Quality Management District* (2010) 158 Cal.App.4th 1336). Essentially, prior operating permits or permit levels do not in themselves establish a baseline for CEQA review of a new project. As set forth in *Communities for a Better Environment v. South Coast Air Quality Management District*, a long line of California Court of Appeals decisions has upheld this line of reasoning. These decisions have included cases where a plan or project allowed for greater development or more intense activity than had so far actually occurred, as well as cases where actual development or activity had, by the time CEQA analysis was begun, already exceeded that allowed under the existing regulations.

In accordance with CEQA, the baseline herd to be used in this environmental analysis is the herd count at the time that the NOP is circulated, comprising a total of 7,000 mature cows and 7,000 support stock.

REQUIRED APPROVALS, OTHER PROCESSES, AND CONSULTATIONS

To allow for the expansion of the dairy, the applicant has submitted an application for issuance of a new CUP (CUP25-009) from the County. It is this action that will be the subject of the EIR. The CVRWQCB and the SJVAPCD both regulate the existing dairy and heifer facility. As responsible agencies, they will be required to use the County’s environmental document in their consideration of the proposed dairy expansion and permit approvals.

A listing and brief description of the regulatory permits and approvals required to implement the proposed project is provided below. The EIR will address the environmental impacts associated with all of the following decision actions and approvals.

Merced County and Other Local and Regional Agencies

Merced County

The County has the following permitting authority related to the proposed project:

- Preparation and approval of an Environmental Impact Report - Merced County will act as the lead agency as defined by CEQA and will have authority to determine if the Environmental Impact Report is adequate under CEQA.
- Consideration of the Conditional Use Permit - Merced County will consider the proposed project as a Conditional Use Permit. Conditional Use Permits are discretionary permits for uses of land that require special review to ensure that they are compatible with the neighborhood and surrounding land uses. They are considered more likely to affect surrounding land uses than uses permitted by right in a zoning district or those uses permitted under Administrative Permits.
- Building Permit - Merced County will require a building permit for the proposed project, specifically for any new structures exceeding 120 square feet.
- Demolition Permits – Merced County will require a demolition permit for each feature to be demolished.
- Hazardous Material Business Plan (HMBP) - The on-site storage of any hazardous material over threshold quantities (55 gallons; 200 cu. ft.; or 500 pounds) would require a HMBP to be filed with the DEH. Any quantity of hazardous waste generated on site also requires that a HMBP be filed. A HMBP has been submitted and accepted by DEH as of March 2, 2019. Any changes to materials stored on-site that are above threshold quantities must be updated in the facility's HMBP within 30 days.
- Merced County MS4 Storm Water Permit, Order No. 2013-0001-DWQ – Since the project includes more than 5,000 square feet of new impervious surface, the applicant must implement site design, source control, runoff reduction and storm water treatment as described in the permit.
- Well Permit - A well permit application will be considered by Merced County for the proposed domestic well.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

- Authority to Construct / Permit to Operate – The owner or operator of any facility or activity (including agricultural activities) that emits criteria air pollutants or their precursors above certain thresholds must first obtain an Authority to Construct (ATC) from the SJVAPCD. All new sources exceeding thresholds will be required to apply for an ATC and PTO; this essentially is one permit that is issued in two steps. The applicant first obtains an ATC with specific conditions for implementation during construction; then an inspection is completed and, if all the conditions of the ATC are met during construction, the applicant is issued a PTO. Beyond the ATC and PTO, preparation of an air quality impact assessment would be required, in addition to compliance with other SJVAPCD regulations.
- A Conservation Management Plan (CMP) to the SJVAPCD would be required because the nutrients from the heifer facility are sent to cropland associated with the existing dairy.

State of California

State agencies have the following permitting authority related to the proposed project:

State Water Resources Control Board

- General Construction Activity – The State Water Resources Control Board has adopted a General Construction Activity Storm Water Permit for storm water discharges associated with any construction activity, including clearing, grading, excavation, reconstruction, and dredge and fill activities, that results in the disturbance of at least one acre of total land area.

Regional Water Quality Control Board - Central Valley Region

- Waste Discharge Requirements – The owner or operator of any facility or activity that discharges, or proposes to discharge, waste that may affect groundwater quality or from which waste may be discharged in a diffused manner (e.g., erosion from soil disturbance) must first obtain a WDR permit from the CVRWQCB. The CVRWQCB regulates discharges from confined animal facilities according to the anti-degradation requirements of the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act and the Water Quality Control Plan for the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins. The project applicant submitted a Notice of Intent for coverage under the Waste Discharge Requirements General Order for Confined Bovine Operations, Order R5-2017-0058 (Bovine Feedlot Order) for the heifer facility in June 2018.

Federal Government

It is anticipated that no permitting from federal agencies would be required.

APPLICATION OF THE 2030 MERCED COUNTY GENERAL PLAN, MERCED COUNTY ANIMAL CONFINEMENT ORDINANCE, AND MERCED COUNTY ZONING CODE

2030 Merced County General Plan

The 2030 Merced County General Plan guides economic development, land use, agriculture, transportation and circulation, public facilities and services, natural resources, recreation, cultural resources, health and safety, air quality, water, and other matters of public interest and concern. The General Plan is intended to provide for orderly growth, and to convey the community's values and expectations for the future. An EIR for the 2030 General Plan was certified and the General Plan adopted by Merced County in December 2013. A Draft Background Report of existing environmental conditions within the County was finalized in December 2013 with certification of the General Plan EIR. The Background Report functions as the existing setting section for the General Plan EIR. The EIR, including the Background Report as updated, is used in this Godinho Dairy Expansion Initial Study and will be used in the proposed project EIR, along with other resources, to establish the existing setting for the proposed project. The General Plan EIR will serve as the first tier of environmental analysis for the proposed project, including the evaluation of countywide and cumulative impacts. The 2030 General Plan EIR, including the Background Report, is hereby incorporated by reference pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15150 as though fully set forth herein. A copy of the General Plan, General Plan EIR, and Background Report can be obtained at the Department of Community and Economic Development, 2222 'M' Street, Merced,

CA 95340. These documents are also available for download from the Merced County General Plan website at: <https://www.countyofmerced.com/100/General-Plan>.

Merced County Animal Confinement Ordinance and Zoning Code

On October 22, 2002, Merced County adopted revisions to the County's ACO. Additional revisions to the Merced County ACO and Merced County Code Chapter 18.10 (Zoning Code Agricultural Zones) were adopted on February 8, 2005. The Merced County ACO is included as a section of Title 18 Zoning of the Merced County Code. A comprehensive update and amendment of Title 18 of the Merced County Code was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on October 22, 2019 (no substantive changes were made to the ACO during this update). The ACO regulates the design, construction, and operation of animal confinement facilities within the county. Because the Ordinance is regulatory rather than permissive, all existing and proposed animal confinement facilities within the county are required to comply with the terms of the Ordinance, including the proposed Godinho Dairy Expansion project.

Following is a summary of major ACO provisions. Copies of the complete text of the Ordinance are available from: the Merced County Community and Economic Development Department, 2222 'M' Street, Merced, California 95340; and on the County's website at: <http://www.qcode.us/codes/mercedcounty/>

Merced County's ACO provides environmental compliance regulations that affect dairies and other animal confinement facilities in Merced County. The ACO requires that all animal confinement facilities, existing and new, complete and implement a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP). For the construction of a new confined animal facility, or for modification or expansion of an existing animal confinement facility, the CNMP must be completed prior to construction. The purpose of the CNMP is to ensure a balance between manure/wastewater application and nutrient uptake by crops in order to minimize impacts on groundwater. Since adoption of the ACO, the CVRWQCB has issued requirements for the preparation of a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) and Waste Management Plan, which together serve in place of the CNMP as allowed by County Code Chapter 18.64.060 K.

In addition to the CNMP, the ACO includes measures designed to increase protection of surface and groundwater resources. Both liquid and dry manure are regulated by the ACO under detailed management requirements. For example, the ACO prohibits the storage or application of manure (liquid or dry) within 100 feet of a surface water body or irrigation well unless adequate protection is provided. Dry manure storage and application is regulated to prevent groundwater or surface water contamination. In addition, the liquid manure management system must include provisions for appropriate cropland application and collection of tailwater from cropland irrigated with liquid manure. The ACO requires that all off-site discharge of drainage water from cropland application areas meet the discharge and receiving water standards of the appropriate irrigation or drainage district and the CVRWQCB.

The ACO also includes design and management provisions for the construction of retention ponds and settling basins to prevent groundwater contamination, obnoxious odors, or excessive fly or mosquito breeding. The retention pond provisions of the ACO apply only to new or expanding animal confinement facilities. The ACO measures for retention ponds and settling basins include capacity requirements, maintenance guidelines, size restrictions, and minimum design standards of 10⁻⁶

centimeters per second seepage velocity or less. However, the CVRWQCB's Reissued Waste Discharge Requirements General Order for Existing Milk Cow Dairies (Order R5-2013-0122) establishes performance standards for new wastewater ponds that are more stringent and replace the ACO requirements.

To prevent nuisances from odors or vectors, the ACO requires animal confinement facilities to implement both odor control measures and a Vector Control Plan. The need for specific control measures is determined by the Merced County DEH on a site-specific basis. Additionally, the ACO prohibits the location of new animal confinement facilities within one-half mile of urban areas, areas zoned for residential uses, or concentrations of rural residences. To provide additional protection from the nuisances mentioned above, the ACO generally prohibits the location of animal confinement facilities within 1,000 feet of an off-site residence, unless written permission from the off-site resident or property owner is given.

The ACO regulates the design, construction, and operation of animal confinement facilities within the County; all existing and proposed animal confinement facilities within the County are required to comply with the terms of the Ordinance, including the Godinho Dairy Expansion project. To ensure compliance with the provisions of the ACO, the Ordinance requires routine inspections of animal confinement facilities by Merced County DEH. Enforcement of the provisions contained in the revised ACO is conducted by Merced County DEH and the Community and Economic Development Department. In addition, the ACO includes penalties for any person who violates or fails to comply with the provisions of the ACO.

TIERING FROM BOTH THE 2030 MERCED COUNTY GENERAL PLAN EIR AND THE MERCED COUNTY ANIMAL CONFINEMENT ORDINANCE EIR

"Tiering" refers to the relationship between a program-level EIR (where long-range programmatic cumulative impacts are the focus of the environmental analysis) and subsequent environmental analyses such as this subject document, which focus primarily on issues unique to a smaller project within the larger program or plan pursuant to Section 15168 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Through tiering, a subsequent environmental analysis can incorporate, by reference, discussion that summarizes general environmental data found in the program EIR that establishes cumulative impacts and mitigation measures, the planning context, and/or the regulatory background. These broad-based issues need not be reevaluated subsequently, having been previously identified and evaluated at the program stage.

Tiering focuses the environmental review on the project-specific significant effects that were not examined in the prior environmental review or are susceptible to substantial reduction or avoidance by specific revisions in the project, by the imposition of conditions, or by other means. Section 21093(b) of the Public Resources Code requires the tiering of environmental review whenever feasible, as determined by the Lead Agency.

In the case of the Godinho Dairy Expansion project, the environmental analysis will be tiered from both the EIR for the *2030 Merced County General Plan* and the EIR for the *Merced County Animal Confinement Ordinance Revision*. As the Merced County Animal Confinement Ordinance EIR was completed in 2002, the 2030 Merced County General Plan updates conclusions on the cumulative condition for all project types, including proposed and expanding dairy facility projects such as the Godinho Dairy Expansion project. The tiering concept will be discussed more fully in the EIR for this project.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

PURPOSE AND LEGAL BASIS FOR THE INITIAL STUDY

As a public disclosure document, this Initial Study provides local decision makers and the public with information regarding the environmental impacts associated with the proposed project. According to Section 15063 of the CEQA Guidelines, the purpose of an Initial Study is to:

1. Provide the Lead Agency with information to use as the basis for deciding whether to prepare an EIR or a Negative Declaration.
2. Enable an applicant or Lead Agency to modify a project, mitigating adverse impacts before an EIR is prepared, thereby enabling the project to qualify for a Negative Declaration.
3. Assist in the preparation of an EIR, if one is required by:
 - a. Focusing the EIR on the effects determined to be significant,
 - b. Identifying the effects determined not to be significant,
 - c. Explaining the reasons for determining that potentially significant effects would not be significant, and
 - d. Identifying whether a program EIR, tiering, or another appropriate process can be used for analysis of the project's environmental effects.
4. Facilitate environmental assessment early in the design of a project.
5. Provide documentation of the factual basis for the finding in a Negative Declaration that a project will not have a significant effect on the environment.
6. Eliminate unnecessary EIRs.
7. Determine whether a previously prepared EIR could be used with the project.

INITIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST

Following each major environmental category and topic in the Initial Study, there are four determinations by which to judge the project's impact. These categories and their meanings are shown below:

“No Impact” means that it is anticipated that the project will not affect the physical environment on or around the project area. It therefore does not warrant mitigation measures.

“Less-than-Significant Impact” means the project is anticipated to affect the physical environment on and around the project area, however to a less-than-significant degree, and therefore not warranting mitigation measures.

“Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated” applies to impacts where the incorporation of mitigation measures into a project has reduced an effect from “Potentially Significant” to “Less Than Significant.” In such cases, and with such projects, mitigation measures will be provided including a brief explanation of how they reduce the effect to a less-than-significant level.

“Potentially Significant Impact” means there is substantial evidence that an effect is significant, and no mitigation is possible.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED

The environmental factors checked below would be potentially affected by this project, including several impacts that could result in a “Potentially Significant Impact” or “Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated” as indicated by the checklist on the following pages.

	Aesthetics		Agriculture and Forestry Resources	X	Air Quality
X	Biological Resources		Cultural Resources		Energy
	Geology / Soils	X	Greenhouse Gas Emissions		Hazards & Hazardous Materials
X	Hydrology / Water Quality		Land Use / Planning		Mineral Resources
X	Noise		Population and Housing		Public Services
	Recreation		Transportation	X	Tribal Cultural Resources
	Utilities / Service Systems		Wildfire	X	Mandatory Findings of Significance

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING AND EVALUATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Responses to the following questions and related discussion indicate whether or not the proposed project would have or would potentially have a significant adverse impact on the environment, either individually or cumulatively with other projects. All phases of project planning, implementation, and operation are considered. Mandatory Findings of Significance are located in Section XXI below.

I. AESTHETICS				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project:				
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?				X
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?				X
c) In non-urban areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point.) If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?			X	
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?			X	

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The primary scenic resource within Merced County is the rural and agricultural landscape of nonurbanized areas of the county. The project site is currently in agricultural use (existing dairy and heifer facility) and is surrounded by agricultural uses and associated residences. Due to the relatively flat topography, short- and mid-range views are limited to agricultural uses, including pasture, row crops, and orchards. Long-range views feature the Coastal ranges (Merced County 2013a).

The site appearance is one of a developed animal confinement facility within a rural, agricultural setting. Viewers outside the project site are limited to motorists on perimeter roadways and residents of surrounding agricultural facilities and operations. Neither the project site nor the views to or from the site have been designated as an important scenic resource by Merced County or any other public agency. No state or locally designated scenic highway has been identified in the vicinity of the project area (Merced County 2013a).

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Question (a) Scenic vista: No Impact. Given the lack of distinctive topographical features in the project vicinity, the project site is not located in an area with scenic vistas. The agricultural-related facilities and associated residences in the vicinity are existing uses and are considered common to the area. No designated scenic vista is visible from the project site, nor is the site visible from any nearby scenic vista. The dairy and associated heifer facilities are an existing use and would be considered common to the area. The proposed project would be an expansion of those existing uses. Because the proposed dairy expansion would not affect a scenic vista, no impact would result with implementation of the project, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (b) Scenic resources: No Impact. No state- or locally designated scenic highway is visible from the project site, nor is the site visible from any nearby designated scenic highway. The nearest designated State Scenic Highway is a section of Interstate 5, approximately 8 miles to the west of the project site. In addition, no scenic highways are designated within the project area in the Merced County 2030 General Plan. Because the project site is not located within the viewshed of a designated scenic highway, there would be no impact to scenic resources within a scenic highway. No impact would result with implementation of the project, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (c) Visual character: Less-than-significant Impact. Developed agricultural uses in the vicinity range from irrigated cropland to animal confinement facilities. Though the existing dairy and heifer facilities are visible from perimeter roads, their appearance is a common sight in rural areas of Merced County, and the visual effects of the animal confinement facilities are reasonable and expected in the context of the County's Agricultural land use designation. The proposed project would appear similar to existing uses on the project site and in the project area and would continue to be considered common and appropriate to the region by most viewers. Since the proposed project is consistent with the existing and planned agricultural uses of the area, implementation of the project would not degrade the existing visual character of the site or surroundings. This would have a less-than-significant impact, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (d) New source of light or glare: Less-than-significant Impact. Existing night lighting in the area of the proposed project includes LED fixtures mounted on the existing structures. The proposed project would result in additional building-mounted lighting on the

proposed freestalls, loafing barns and other structures. While there are residences in the vicinity of active dairy and heifer ranch operations, which are considered sensitive receptors for nighttime light and glare, County standards require that all new lighting be directed away from or be properly shaded to eliminate light trespass or glare within a project or onto surrounding properties. Compliance with County requirements would reduce any light and glare effects to less-than-significant levels. For a discussion of light and glare impacts on nearby biological resources, see Section IV, *Biological Resources*.

II. AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?			X	
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?			X	
c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined in Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined in Public Resources Code section 51104(g))?				X
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?				X
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?				X

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The project area consists of an existing dairy facility and heifer ranch and cropped fields surrounded by similar agricultural uses and associated residences. The project site and surrounding area is designated Agricultural by the 2030 Merced County General Plan and is zoned A-1 (General Agricultural). Project site parcels APN 070-180-044 and 070-180-028 and under Williamson Act Contract, while the project site parcels south of Henry Miller Avenue are not subject to a Williamson Act Contract, nor are they zoned as forest land or timberland production (Merced County 2024).

According to the California Department of Conservation's (DOC) Important Farmlands Map of Merced County, the area of existing dairy and heifer ranch facilities are designated as Confined Animal Agriculture (DOC 2020). As defined by the DOC, this designation includes poultry facilities, feedlots, dairy and other confined animal facilities, and fish farms. The proposed expansion would include approximately five acres for a feed storage area on existing cropland that is designated by the DOC's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program as Prime Farmland.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides agricultural ratings for soils in the project area in the Merced County Soil Survey. The project site and existing cropland areas associated with the project are designated by the NRCS as "Prime Farmland if Irrigated," "Farmland of Statewide Importance," and "Not Prime Farmland" (NRCS 2025). For a discussion of project site soil properties, see Section VII, *Geology and Soils*.

There are no forest lands, timberland, or timberland zoned Timberland Production in Merced County (Merced County 2026).

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Question (a) Convert farmland to non-agricultural use: Less-than-significant Impact. The area of existing facilities is located on land that is classified as Confined Animal Agriculture. The project area is designated for agricultural use by the 2030 Merced County General Plan. The proposed expansion would include the addition of a feed storage area (approximately 5.0 acres) on APN 070-180-028 that is designated as Prime Farmland. As a result of project implementation, existing cropland would be partially converted into a feed storage area. The proposed expansion, however, would represent a continuation of existing agricultural uses, and no conversion of agricultural soils to non-agricultural uses would occur. Because the project site would be maintained in agricultural use, construction of the proposed facilities would not convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of statewide importance to a non-agricultural use, and a less-than-significant impact would result. No mitigation would be required.

Question (b) Conflict with zoning for agricultural use: Less-than-significant Impact. The 2030 Merced County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance designate the project area predominantly for agricultural uses. Project site parcels APN 070-180-044 and 070-180-028 and under Williamson Act Contract, while the project site parcels south of Henry Miller Avenue are not subject to a Williamson Act Contract, nor are they zoned as forest land or timberland production (Merced County 2024). The existing uses, a dairy facility and heifer ranch, are agricultural uses consistent with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Adjacent properties include agricultural uses, primarily field crops and animal confinement facilities. No feature of the proposed project would preclude or

limit the agricultural use of adjoining parcels. Thus, the proposed project would permit the continuation of existing agricultural uses consistent with County policies and would not conflict with adjacent agricultural and/or non-agricultural uses. A less-than-significant impact would result, and no mitigation would be required. For a discussion of project compatibility with adjacent residential uses, see Section XI, *Land Use and Planning* of this Initial Study.

Questions (c) through (e) Conflict with zoning for or loss of farmland, forest land, or timber land: No Impact. The project site is not zoned for forest land or timberland, and there are no forest or timber resources located in the project area. Thus, there would be no loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use. The proposed facilities would not result in any change to the existing environment that could result in the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use. Because the proposed project would not conflict with any existing forest land or timberland productions zoning, and no changes associated with the project are proposed that would result in the conversion of existing farmland, forest land, or timber lands, no impact would occur. No mitigation would be required.

III. AIR QUALITY				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations. Would the project:				
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	X			
b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?	X			
c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	X			
d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	X			

Questions (a) through (d) Air Quality Impacts: Potentially Significant Impact. The proposed project is anticipated to have potentially significant impacts from the following air emission sources that will be evaluated further in the EIR: construction-related emissions of reactive organic gases, nitrogen oxides and fugitive dust; operation-related emissions of carbon monoxide, ozone precursors, fugitive dust, and hazardous pollutants; and odors from project operations. An Air Quality Impact Assessment, including a Health Risk Assessment and an Ambient Air Quality Analysis (should it be required), will be prepared and will address emissions from: criteria pollutants; hydrogen sulfide, ammonia; particulate matter and its toxic components (e.g., aluminum, lead, manganese, nickel, etc.); and xylenes, formaldehydes, and carbon tetrachloride from Volatile Organic Compounds.

Naturally Occurring Asbestos

Naturally occurring asbestos is not a potential concern in the project area. For more information, see Section IX, *Hazards and Hazardous Materials*.

IV. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	X			
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, and regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	X			
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	X			
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery site?	X			
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	X			
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	X			

Questions (a) through (f) Biological Resource Impacts: Potentially Significant Impact.

Construction of the proposed facilities and increased activities as a result of the proposed dairy and heifer facility expansion could result in impacts on special-status species and migratory birds, including light and glare impacts on nearby biological resources. These would be potentially significant impacts that will be evaluated further in the EIR. A reconnaissance-level biological survey of the project site will be conducted to assess existing biological conditions and potential impacts.

V. CULTURAL RESOURCES

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to § 15064.5?		X		
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to § 15064.5?		X		
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries?		X		

Questions (a) through (d) Cultural Resource Impacts: Less than-significant Impact with Mitigation. Records of the known cultural resources found in Merced County are included in the files of the Office of Historic Preservation and California Historical Resources Information System. The Central California Information Center (CCIC), housed at California State University, Stanislaus, locally administers these records.

The heifer facility portion of the proposed project was the subject of a Cultural Resources Investigation in October 2019 (Napton 2019). Methodology included literature and records research, including those records in the files of the CCIC and the Native American Heritage Commission, and direct in-field cultural resources sensitivity assessment of the proposed project area.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The CCIC Records Search for the prior CUP for the heifer facility reported that there has been one previous investigation within the project area, and two investigations within a 0.5-mile radius of the project area, which includes the existing dairy facility. No formally reported prehistoric, historic, or archaeological resources were found within the project area. Within the general vicinity, eleven historic ranches have been recorded. It was also noted that the project area is 0.75 mile east of Los Banos Creek, an area of sensitivity in reference to prehistoric archaeological resources (Napton 2019).

Direct field survey of the proposed project was conducted on two occasions to examine the proposed project area, within limitations imposed by the consideration that cultural resources could be buried or concealed by vegetation. The field investigation of the proposed project produced no evidence of the presence or former presence of cultural resources within the project area (Napton 2019).

While the proposed project area cannot be characterized as highly sensitive from an archaeological or ethnographic perspective, pre-field background research indicates that the region could have been visited or occupied seasonally or occasionally by the Yokuts or their Miwok neighbors (Napton 2019).

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

State and federal legislation requires the protection of historical and cultural resources. In 1971, President's Executive Order No. 11593 required that all federal agencies initiate procedures to

preserve and maintain cultural resources by nomination and inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1980, Governor's Executive Order No. B-64-80 required that state agencies inventory all "significant historic and cultural sites, structures, and objects under their jurisdiction which are over 50 years of age, and which may qualify for listing on the National Register of Historic Places." Section 15064.5(b)(1) of the CEQA Guidelines specifies that projects that cause "...physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of an historic resource would be materially impaired" shall be found to have a significant impact on the environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Questions (a) through (c) Historical and archaeological resources, human remains: Less than-significant Impact with Mitigation. No prehistoric or historic resources were identified on the project site. Within the general vicinity of the project, eleven historic ranches have been reported to the CCIC. No archaeological resources were identified on the project site or in the general vicinity. Cultural resources are suspected to be minimal because the dominant land use has been for agricultural uses (including leveling, cultivation, grading, and construction of the existing dairy facility and heifer ranch). The entire project area has been highly modified by development of the existing facilities or cropped fields.

However, significant cultural remains can also exist below the plow zone in Merced County, and such resources could be unearthed during construction activities at the project site. Through Resolution 20-001, Merced County has imposed conditions relating to undiscovered cultural resources pursuant to Section 5097.98 of the State Public Resources Code, and Section 7050.5 of the State Health and Safety Code. To ensure project compliance with these regulatory requirements, the following mitigation measure from the Merced County Animal Confinement Ordinance EIR would be required for the proposed project:

Mitigation Measure CUL-1:

If archaeological resources are encountered at any site of a confined animal facility during construction, work in the vicinity of the find shall be suspended or diverted. The applicant shall retain a qualified archaeologist (i.e., qualified under the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for archaeologists) to perform an assessment of the resource. Depending on the nature of any such find, evaluation may include determination of site boundaries and assessment of site integrity and significance. Standards for site evaluation shall adhere to appropriate State and Federal requirements (including California Public Resources Code Section 21083). Evaluation shall include, if necessary, site mapping and/or limited subsurface testing using standard archaeological methods in accordance with CEQA Guidelines, Section 15064.5.

If after evaluation, a resource is judged to be of significance pursuant to CEQA Guidelines criteria, a mitigation plan shall be prepared in accordance with appropriate guidelines and submitted to the Merced County Planning & Community Development Department. Mitigation could include avoidance, site capping, data recovery, or a combination of these or other measures, as determined by the qualified archaeologist. Consultation with representatives of recognized, local Native American groups shall be reflected in the development of any mitigation plan.

Because no resources have been discovered during previous disturbances of the project site, with implementation of the above regulatory requirements, including Mitigation Measure CUL-1 from the Merced County Animal Confinement Ordinance EIR, the proposed project would result in a less-than-significant impact to cultural resources and human remains. No additional mitigation would be required.

VI. ENERGY				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Result in potentially significant environmental impacts due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?			X	
b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?			X	

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

State and Local Energy Plans

California's first Long Term Energy Efficiency Strategic Plan presents a single roadmap to achieve maximum energy savings across all major groups and sectors in California. This comprehensive Plan for 2009 to 2020 was the state's first integrated framework of goals and strategies for saving energy, covering government, utility, and private sector actions, and holds energy efficiency to its role as the highest priority resource in meeting California's energy needs. The Plan identified agriculture as a unique opportunity to integrate renewable energy from biogas from animal waste. However, the Plan did not focus specific attention on renewable energy.

The California Renewables Portfolio Standard (RPS) was established in 2002 under Senate Bill 1078 and updated in 2006 and 2011 under Senate Bill 107 and Senate Bill 2, respectively. The California RPS program required investor-owned utilities, electric service providers, and community choice aggregators to increase procurement from eligible renewable energy resources to 33 percent of total procurement by 2020. Dairy digesters producing electricity are an eligible RPS technology.

The *California Green Building Standards Code* (CALGreen Code) (California Code of Regulations, Title 24, Part 11) is a part of the California Building Standards Code that comprehensively regulates the planning, design, operation, and construction of newly constructed buildings throughout the state. Both mandatory and voluntary measures are included in the CALGreen Code. Mandatory measures for non-residential structures include standards for light pollution reduction, energy efficiency, and water conservation, among others.

Senate Bills 605 and 1383 direct the California Air Resources Board, in coordination with other state agencies and air districts, to implement a statewide strategy to reduce short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs), such as methane, fluorinated gases, and black carbon, which are highly potent contributors to climate change. Adopted in 2017, the SLCP Reduction Strategy sets a target under SB 1383 to reduce methane emissions from dairy and livestock manure management by 40 percent below 2013 levels by 2030, primarily through voluntary, incentive-based measures. The legislation delayed any

mandatory manure methane regulations until 2024 and promotes voluntary reductions from enteric fermentation until specified conditions are met. To address the technical, market, and regulatory challenges of achieving these reductions, SB 1383 also required the creation of a public forum, leading to the formation of the Dairy and Livestock Greenhouse Gas Reduction Working Group, composed of the California Air Resources Board, CDFA, CEC, and CPUC representatives.

As discussed in Section VIII, *Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, below, Merced County does not yet have an adopted Climate Action Plan or energy plan. The County is in the process of preparing a Climate Action Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Question (a) Wasteful consumption of energy resources: Less-than-significant Impact.

Development of the proposed dairy facility and heifer ranch expansion would entail energy consumption that includes both direct and indirect expenditures of energy. Indirect energy would be consumed by the use of construction materials for the project (e.g., energy resource exploration, power generation, mining and refining of raw materials into construction materials used, including placement). Direct energy impacts would result from the total fuel consumed in vehicle propulsion (e.g., construction vehicles, heavy equipment, and other vehicles using the facility). No unusual materials, or those in short supply, are required in the construction of the project. The dairy facility currently uses propane and is estimated at 480 gallons per month, which is relatively consistent year-round.

At both facilities, energy efficiency upgrades have been incorporated into existing operations at the active animal confinement facilities. At the existing heifer housing, energy efficient LED lights are used. Proposed lighting would be building-mounted with LED fixtures. During daytime hours, only natural lighting in the barns is necessary. According to the applicant, the proposed well pump would have a variable frequency drive, any replacement pumps needed in the future would have variable frequency drives, which are more efficient than standard pumps.

While the proposed project would result in an increase in energy use, there could be a small increase in energy efficiency since larger farms generally use machinery more efficiently, in terms of cost-per-acre and labor. Because the existing features at both facilities would be considered energy efficient, and energy efficient features have been incorporated into project operations, this would have a less-than significant impact. No mitigation would be required.

Question (b) Conflict with state or local energy efficiency plans: Less-than-significant

Impact. Implementation of the proposed project would not be inconsistent with California's Long Term Energy Efficiency Strategic Plan since standards and required actions for energy efficiency in the agricultural sector have not currently been adopted. The Long Term Energy Efficiency Strategic Plan identifies energy reduction goals for the agricultural sector, with emphasis on reducing energy from agricultural pumping. At this time, the highest priority identified in the Strategic Plan is to conduct baseline studies to understand the energy usage patterns in California's agricultural sector in order to design a cohesive strategy to pursue all cost-effective energy efficiency measures. The plans and supporting regulations cited above would also result in increased energy efficiency or support renewable energy on animal confinement facilities. The Scoping Plan, the Long Term Energy Efficiency Strategic Plan, SB 1383, and other GHG emissions reduction, renewable energy, and energy efficiency plans and regulatory measures do not include regulatory requirements immediately

applicable to the agricultural sector; rather, as a result of these plans, agencies may establish rules in the future that could apply to the proposed project. Any dairy or heifer facility expansion project would have to go through the local permitting process and would have to adhere to the rules in place at that time.

Currently, there are no state, regional, or local policies or requirements in place that are specifically applicable to the project that would result in the promotion of renewable energy or energy efficiency. Because standards for the increase in energy efficiency in the agricultural sector are not currently in place, the proposed project would not conflict with any plans or regulations adopted for the purpose of promoting renewable energy or energy efficiency. This would have a less-than significant impact, and no mitigation would be required.

VII. GEOLOGY AND SOILS				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:				
i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42?				X
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?			X	
iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?			X	
iv) Landslides?				X
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?			X	
c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?			X	
d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?			X	
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?				X
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?			X	

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Geology

The project site is located within the Great Central Valley of California. The Central Valley is composed primarily of alluvial deposits from erosion of the Sierra Nevada located to the east and of

the Coastal Ranges located to the west. The elevation of the project site is approximately 95-100 feet above mean sea level (MSL). The topography of the project site is generally flat, with varying agricultural field elevations.

Soils

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides agricultural ratings for soils in the project area in the Merced County Soil Survey. Predominant soils in the project area as classified by the NRCS consist of Henmel clay loam, partially drained, Pedcat clay loam, leveled, 0 to 2 percent slopes, Stanislaus clay loam, Turlock loam, leveled, Woo loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes, and Edminster loam soil types (NRCS 2025). Soil properties can also influence the development of building sites, including site selection, structural design, construction, performance after construction, and maintenance.

Soil properties that affect the load-supporting capacity of an area include groundwater depth, ponding, subsidence, shrink-swell potential, and compressibility. The properties that affect the ease and amount of excavation include flooding, depth to a water table, ponding, slope, depth to bedrock or a cemented pan, hardness of bedrock or a cemented pan, and the amount and size of rock fragments. The project site consists of soils that present limitations for development. These soil types are very limited by a shallow depth to the saturated zone and shrink-swell potential (NRCS 2025).

Faults and Seismicity

The project site is not located within a mapped fault zone or landslide and liquefaction zone. There is no record or evidence of faulting on the project site (DOC 2024). The site is located in Seismic Damage Zone III, indicating a high severity level with major probable damage in the event of severe seismic activity (Merced County 2013b).

REGULATORY SETTING

Merced County regulates the effects of soils and geological constraints on urban development primarily through enforcement of the California Building Code (CBC), which requires the implementation of engineering solutions for constraints to urban development posed by slopes, soils, and geology.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Question (a.i) Earthquake fault: No Impact. The project site is not located within a mapped earthquake fault, and there is no record or evidence of faulting on the project site (Merced County 2013b; DOC 2024). Because no fault traces underlie the project site, no hazardous conditions would result from implementation of the project. There would be no impact.

Question (a.ii) Ground shaking: Less-than-significant Impact. As noted above, the project site is located in Seismic Damage Zone III (Merced County 2013b). Should an earthquake occur in the vicinity of the project site, it could result in major damage. Dairies are categorized as a low-risk use that is considered suitable in all ground-shaking zones. However, Merced County requires that all new construction comply with the seismic safety requirements of the CBC. Compliance with the

CBC would reduce risks on the project site from seismic ground shaking to levels considered acceptable for the State and region. This would have a less-than-significant impact, and no mitigation is required beyond compliance with adopted building standards.

Question (a.iii) Ground failure, liquefaction: Less-than-significant Impact. The project site is not located within a mapped liquefaction zone and soils in the project area are largely dominated by soils with high-to-moderate clay content (Merced County 2013b). The proposed project would employ standard construction practices and comply with CBC requirements for the State. Standard design, construction, and safety procedures would limit soil liquefaction hazards to levels deemed acceptable in the State and region. Adherence with adopted building standards would avoid substantial adverse effects due to the risk of loss, injury, or death involving liquefaction or other seismic-related ground failure. This would have a less-than-significant impact, and no mitigation is required.

Question (a.iv) Landslides: No Impact. The project site is generally flat and is not located near steep slopes with unstable soils that may be susceptible to landslides. Also, the greater project area is not noted for unstable geologic formations susceptible to landslides (DOC 2024). Therefore, the project would not be exposed to potential geologic hazards, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving a landslide. There would be no impact.

Question (b) Soil erosion: Less-than-significant Impact. Construction of the proposed facilities would occur in the area of existing ranch facilities and existing agricultural fields that have been previously graded. While implementation of the proposed project could result in temporary soil erosion and the loss of topsoil due to construction activities, the location where the proposed expansion facilities would be constructed is generally level from previous grading.

Approximately 251,900 cubic yards of fill would be obtained from adjacent fields associated with the project in order to construct the building pads for proposed structures, feed storage area and wastewater retention pond. Minimal additional modification to the site's existing topography or ground surface relief would be required. Also, the proposed project site soils are not limited by erosion potential (NRCS 2025), meaning little or no erosion is likely. This would have a less-than-significant impact, and no mitigation would be necessary.

Question (c) Unstable geologic unit: Less-than-significant Impact. Construction of the project facilities could increase loads on the project site that could cause soil settlement. The project area is not noted for unstable geologic formations susceptible to subsidence, landslide, or ground failure (DOC 2024; Merced County 2013c). The topography surrounding the dairy and heifer ranch facilities and agricultural field elevations are generally level. Any potential effects from unstable or expansive soils would be minimized following compliance with the Merced County and CBC building standards, and additional corrective engineering measures that would be required to be documented during the building permit process, including the submittal of a soils report. For these reasons, the proposed project would not result in soil instability and subsequent landslide, lateral spreading, liquefaction, or collapse. This would have a less-than-significant impact, and no mitigation would be necessary.

Question (d) Expansive soil: Less-than-significant Impact. Expansive soils are soils that shrink and swell in response to changes in moisture. These volume changes can result in damage over time to building foundations, roads, underground utilities, and other structures, if they are not designed

and constructed appropriately to resist the changing soil conditions. The main limitations of the soil types found on the project site are the shallow depth to the saturated zone and shrink-swell potential (NRCS 2025). The Merced County building code, however, requires a soils report for most non-residential structures within Merced County, and additional corrective engineering measures are required as part of the design for proposed facilities. Further, the proposed dairy and heifer ranch expansion facilities would not be used for human habitation. Compliance with the CBC requirements and additional corrective engineering measures documented during the building permit process would reduce risks on the project site from geological hazards to levels considered acceptable for the State and region. This would be a less-than-significant impact, and no additional mitigation would be required beyond compliance with adopted standards and County requirements.

Question (e) Soils adequately support septic system: No Impact. There are six septic systems at the existing dairy and three septic systems that serve the residences at the heifer facility; no aspect of the proposed project would affect the existing septic systems. Because the proposed dairy and heifer ranch expansion would not involve the construction of any new septic system, there would be no change or impact due to the characteristics of the soils on site. Therefore, no impact would occur, and no mitigation would be necessary.

Question (f) Paleontological resource / unique geologic feature: Less-than-significant Impact. According to available information, the project site is not located in an area known to have produced significant paleontological resources (Napton 2019), nor are there any unique geologic features. Therefore, project construction would not result in the destruction or degradation of paleontological resources or unique geological features. This would have a less-than-significant impact, and no mitigation would be required.

VIII. GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	X			
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases	X			

Questions (a) and (b) Greenhouse gas emissions: Potentially Significant Impact.

Construction and operation of the dairy and heifer facility expansion project would result in greenhouse gas emissions from direct and indirect sources. The proposed project is anticipated to have potentially significant impacts from greenhouse gases (including methane) that will be evaluated further in the EIR for this project.

IX. HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?			X	
b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?			X	
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?				X
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?				X
e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?				X
f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?			X	
g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires?			X	
h) Create significant nuisance conditions to the public or the environment through the generation of insects due to project operations?		X		

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Animal agriculture, particularly dairy operations, generates substantial quantities of manure. This manure, or animal waste, contains zoonotic pathogens, viruses, bacteria, and parasites originating from animals, which have the potential to cause diseases in humans.

The project site does not store hazardous materials, chemicals, pesticides, flammable liquids, or fuels. Additionally, no pest control chemicals are used at this facility. There are no diesel generators present on the site.

A records search of federal, state, and local environmental databases conducted in accordance with Government Code Section 65962.5 revealed that the project site has no history of hazardous site contamination (California Environmental Protection Agency 2026).

There are no schools located within one-quarter mile of the project site. The nearest schools are located in the City of Los Banos, over 1.5 miles south of the project site (Google Earth 2026).

The Merced County Airport Land Use Commission has developed an Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan for county airports. The Los Banos Municipal Airport is located approximately 2.1 miles south of the project site. The project site is not situated within any land use compatibility zones identified in the Plan (Merced County ALUC 2012). According to the 2030 Merced County Emergency Operations Plan, freeways and major county roads would be used as primary evacuation routes in the event of a natural hazard, technological hazard, or domestic security threat.

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the project area is within the Local Responsibility Area (LRA), meaning the financial responsibility of preventing and suppressing wildfires is primarily the responsibility of a local agency (city, county, city and county, or district). Therefore, the project site is not within a Very High or High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) and the threat of wildfire hazard in the area is unlikely (CAL FIRE 2026).

The project site is not in an area identified by the California Geological Survey as having soils that are likely to contain naturally occurring asbestos (USGS 2011). Therefore, no naturally occurring asbestos is expected in on-site soils that could be disturbed during construction, and this issue will not be discussed further.

REGULATORY SETTING

Both federal and state laws include provisions for the safe handling of hazardous substances. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) administers requirements to ensure worker safety. Construction activity must also be in compliance with the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations.

The Merced County DEH is the lead agency for the enforcement of State Hazardous Waste Control laws and regulations. The DEH maintains standards and guidelines relating to the proper handling and storage of hazardous materials. Facilities that handle and store considerable amounts of hazardous materials (55 gallons for liquids, 500 pounds for solids, or 200 cubic feet for compressed gas) are required to implement a Hazardous Materials Business Plan. The HMBP must include the following: an inventory of all hazardous materials handled at the facility, floor plans showing where hazardous materials are stored, an emergency response plan, and provisions for employee training in safety and emergency response procedures. The DEH also maintains minimum design standards relating to the operation and maintenance of on-site septic systems.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Questions (a) and (b) Use and/or accident conditions related to hazardous materials: Less-than-significant Impact. Construction of the proposed project would include the use, storage, transport, and disposal of oil, diesel fuel, paints, solvents, and other hazardous materials. If spilled, these substances could pose a risk to the environment and to human health. Both federal and state laws include provisions for the safe handling of hazardous substances. According to federal health and safety standards, applicable federal OSHA requirements would be in place to ensure worker

safety. Construction activity must also be in compliance with the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations (Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970).

Nutrient-rich process water from the heifer ranch would continue to be used to fertilize off-site crops associated with the Godinho Dairy, thereby precluding the need for large amounts of chemical fertilizers and minimizing the potential risk of release within the project area and region. Similarly, dry manure would continue to be accumulated on site and then hauled off site for use as fertilizer and soil amendments in place of chemical fertilizers.

Previous evaluations of animal confinement facility operations conducted by Merced County (Merced County Animal Confinement Ordinance Revision DEIR, February 2002; Vander Woude Dairy FEIR Staff Presentation to Planning Commission, March 30, 2004) indicate that the following activities and operations at dairies would not result in the release of hazardous substances to the environment:

Potential Source	Explanation	Information Source
Supplements in cattle feed	No complete exposure pathways	Animal Confinement Ordinance DEIR, February 2002, pps. 5-141 to 5-145
Genetically modified crops (grown as forage for dairy animals)	Cattle digestive process breaks down components in feeds including protein into amino acids, and DNA into nucleic acids, that are then excreted; Unpublished research indicates no adverse effects on dung beetles from ingesting manure from cows feeding on Bt corn; Incomplete exposure pathway. GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS ARE GROWN AT THE PROJECT SITE	Vander Woude Dairy FEIR, January 2004, pps. 3-42 to 3-43; Staff Presentation to Planning Commission, March 30, 2004, slides 19 and 25
Recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone	bST is a complex protein that is immediately broken down into small, inactive amino acids and peptides and rendered ineffective when it enters a cows digestive system; Incomplete exposure pathway NOT USED AT THE DAIRY OR HEIFER RANCH	Vander Woude Dairy FEIR, January 2004, pps. 3-42 to 3-43; Staff Presentation to Planning Commission, March 30, 2004, slides 19 and 25
Antibiotics	Use of antibiotics is prohibited for the milking herd NO ANTIBIOTICS ARE USED EXCEPT FOR SICK ANIMALS SEPARATED FROM THE HERD AND TREATED AT THE DAIRY FACILITY	Vander Woude Dairy FEIR, January 2004, pps. 3-42 to 3-43; Staff Presentation to Planning Commission, March 30, 2004, slides 19 and 25

No proposed operation or facility of the proposed project would alter the results of these previous evaluations regarding the release of hazardous substances to the environment from dairy and feedlot operations.

Construction activities for the proposed project would involve the use, storage, transport, and disposal of oil, gasoline, diesel fuel, paints, solvents, and other hazardous materials. Both construction and operation activities must be in compliance with the California OSHA regulations. The proposed operations would not store any diesel fuels and other chemicals commonly used for animal confinement operations. Any quantity of hazardous waste generated on site requires that a

HMBP be filed with the Merced County DEH. Compliance with these requirements would reduce the risk of hazards related to the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials to a less-than-significant level. The risk of hazards to the public or to environmental conditions related to accident conditions would also be reduced to a less-than-significant level.

Because the routine transport, use, and disposal of these materials are subject to local, state, and federal regulations, this impact would be considered less than significant. The risk of hazards to the public or to environmental conditions related to accident conditions would also be reduced to a less-than-significant level, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (c) Hazardous emissions or materials near a school: No Impact. The nearest schools to the animal confinement facilities are located over 1.5 miles from the project site in the City of Los Banos. Therefore, the proposed dairy and heifer facilities expansion would not result in hazardous emissions or handle hazardous waste within 0.25 miles of an existing or proposed school, and no impact would result.

Question (d) Included on list of hazardous materials sites: No Impact. According to queries of the Cortese List data resources (Department of Toxic Substances Control EnviroStor database; State Water Board GeoTracker database, list of solid waste disposal sites with waste constituents above hazardous waste levels, and list of site cleanup program sites; and list of hazardous waste facilities subject to corrective action pursuant to Section 25187.5 of the Health and Safety Code) the project site would not be located on a site identified on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to California Government Code Section 65962.5. Therefore, implementation of the project would not create a significant hazard to the public or the environment. No impact would result, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (e) Safety hazard or excessive noise near airports: No Impact. There are no existing public airports within two miles of the project site, nor is the project site located within an area regulated by an airport land use plan (Merced ALUC 2012). The Los Banos Municipal Airport is just over two miles south of the existing heifer ranch. Therefore, the project would not result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area due to aircraft overflight. There would be no impact, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (f) Impair or interfere with an adopted emergency response/evacuation plan: Less-than-significant Impact. The project site is located in the area of Wilson Road, Johnson Road and Henry Miller Avenue. State Route 165 to the east and SR 152 to the south provide regional access to the site. Freeways and major county roads would be used as primary evacuation routes in the event of emergency. The proposed active dairy and heifer facilities within the project site are not located near a designated arterial roadway; such roadways are used as evacuation routes. The nearest designated arterial roadway is SR 165, located approximately 1.4 miles to the east of the project site. The proposed project does not involve any alterations to existing area roadways or intersections. Additionally, it would not generate a significant increase in traffic that could impede emergency response efforts or evacuation procedures. Therefore, the impact would be less than significant, and no mitigation would be necessary.

Question (g) Exposure to risk involving wildland fires: Less-than-significant Impact. The project area is located within an LRA, where the financial responsibility for wildfire prevention and suppression rests primarily with local agencies, such as cities, counties, or special districts. As a

result, the project site is not within a Very High or High FHSZ, and the potential for wildfire hazard in the area is considered low (CAL FIRE 2026). Accordingly, implementation of the proposed project would not expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death related to wildland fire. Impacts would therefore be less than significant.

Question (h) Nuisance Insects: Potentially Significant Impact. While the existing agricultural character of the project vicinity tends to minimize incompatibility to existing uses, implementation of the proposed project could introduce an additional source of flies and other insects in the area of adjacent residences. No pest control chemicals are used at this facility (Project Applicant 2026).

In efforts to minimize agricultural nuisances, Merced County imposes a required minimum setback between new or expanded confined animal facilities and individual off-site rural residences of 1,000 feet, and the construction of new off-site dwellings is prohibited within 1,000 feet of an existing animal confinement facility. For the Godinho Dairy and Heifer expansion project, there are several off-site residences located within 1,000 feet of the existing dairy and heifer facilities (see Figure 4).

According to Merced County Code Chapter 18.64.040 (B)(2), the modification or expansion of an existing facility must not decrease the existing separation distance from off-site residences to less than 1,000 feet unless the off-site property owner provides written permission. Construction of the proposed facilities would occur within the existing footprint of active dairy operations. While there are five off-site residences within 1,000 feet of the dairy facility, the dairy facility expansion would not reduce the existing distances to these residences (see Figure 7a). The proposed expansion would not reduce the distance to less than 1,000 feet for any off-site residence currently greater than 1,000 feet from existing active dairy facilities (see Figures 7a through 7c).

The ACO also prohibits new dairies within one-half mile of urban areas, areas zoned for residential uses, concentrations of rural residences, and parks (Merced County Code Chapter 18.64.040 (B)(1)(a)). According to Merced County Code Chapter 18.64.040 (B)(2), if the animal confinement facility is located within the minimum setback distance, the modification or expansion of an existing facility must not decrease the existing separation distance from these areas. There are no residentially zoned areas or concentrations of rural residences within the 0.5-mile setback distance (Google Earth 2026; Merced County GIS 2026a). The urban boundary of the City of Los Banos is located approximately 0.5 miles southeast of the active heifer facilities. The proposed expansion would not reduce this setback distance.

The DEH has responsibility for the maintenance of public health in the county. As required by the DEH, the methods for insect control must be described in a Vector Control Plan as outlined in Chapter 18.64.060 C.8.c of the ACO (see Appendix C). A Vector Control Plan has been prepared for the Godinho Heifer Ranch (March 2019). The Plan includes Best Management Practices aimed at providing a reduction in vector populations.

Since adoption of the ACO, the CVRWQCB has become the regulatory body for nutrient management planning, thereby replacing the ACO requirement for submission of a CNMP to the DEH with a state process. As a result, no CNMP (that would have included a Vector Control Plan) has been submitted to DEH for review and approval.

DEH enforces the operational measures of each Vector Control Plan through periodic random inspections, and by requiring the annual submittal of compliance reports. The DEH also responds

to complaints from neighbors of such facilities as described above. No current or active fly complaints have been reported and submitted to DEH at either the dairy or heifer facility (Merced County 2026a).

As required by the ACO, DEH must implement the following procedures if nuisance insect conditions are reported at, or adjacent to, an animal confinement facility:

A. If fly nuisance conditions are reported to the Division of Environmental Health, the Division shall take the following actions:

Within 72 hours of receiving a complaint, the Division of Environmental Health shall determine the species and population density of a fly population during an inspection of the location of the complaint and identify potential sources of flies in the vicinity. At the location of the nuisance complaint, the County will seek to identify access points, identify attractants, and locate breeding sites. If an animal confinement facility is identified as a potential source of the fly nuisance, the County will evaluate the affected herd, identify sources of the fly population, and evaluate weather conditions. In general, an infestation would be indicated by insect pests found on over 25 percent of the animals sampled during monitoring, or by the presence of substantial breeding areas. In the event of infestation causing a nuisance, the County will impose additional control measures on a site-specific basis. Measures that may be required by DEH include both biological and/or chemical pest control methods.

B. If fly nuisance conditions are confirmed and are attributable to operations at an animal confinement facility, the Division of Environmental Health shall require the owner/operator to remedy the nuisance condition within a specified period of time. The Division shall notify the parties reporting the nuisance of its findings and shall provide follow-up inspections to ensure that the nuisance condition is cured. Should the condition persist, the Division shall initiate an enforcement action against the offending operator.

Management measures previously adopted by the County in the EIR for the ACO would apply to the proposed project as included in Mitigation Measures HAZ-1. Because the nearest off-site residence is located less than 1,000 feet from proposed active facilities and the proposed expansion could result in an increase in flies, there is an increased potential for nuisance conditions, and the following mitigation would be required.

Mitigation Measure HAZ-1:

The following operational measures identified in the EIR for the ACO shall be implemented throughout ongoing operations.

1. All confined animal facilities shall implement the following Best Management Practices to address potential fly problems:

- a. Daily inspection of manure flushing systems to ensure that manure is being effectively removed from flushed areas, with particular attention paid to corners and isolated areas;

- b. Daily inspections of water supply and circulation systems to ensure that any leaks are promptly repaired. These inspections shall include all watering troughs to ensure that mechanisms for controlling water level are operating effectively and are protected from damage;
 - c. Regular blading of feeding lanes in freestall barns and corrals to ensure that spilled feed is promptly removed and disposed;
 - d. Daily removal of manure and spilled feed from stalls in freestall barns;
 - e. Scraping of corrals at least twice a year to minimize the potential for development of fly populations on manure;
 - f. Weekly inspection of silage storage areas to ensure proper covering, drainage, and removal of any spoiled silage;
 - g. Weekly inspection of fence lines of corrals and other “edge” areas, and removal of any accumulated manure;
 - h. Periodic monitoring of stable flies by direct observation and counting of the number of stable flies on the legs of a representative number, minimum of two percent, of the support stock herd;
 - i. All exterior doors and windows in milk rooms shall have screens that are inspected monthly to determine if they are working properly, and to identify rips in the screening. Ripped or otherwise damaged screens shall be repaired or replaced immediately;
 - j. If necessary, flytraps shall be set throughout barns at strategic locations. The traps are inspected monthly, or more frequently if necessary, and replaced when saturated with captured flies.
2. In addition to fly management practices in the cattle housing and milking areas of dairy facilities, the following sanitation practices shall be implemented at animal confinement facilities to control fly populations:
- a. Dead animals shall be stored in a secured area at the dairy facility, and off-site rendering plant operators shall immediately be notified for pickup of carcasses. Carcasses must be removed within three business days pursuant to ACO Section 18.64.005(A);
 - b. Residual feed shall be removed from infrequently used feeding areas;
 - c. All garbage shall be disposed of in closed dumpsters that are regularly emptied by a contracted waste management service for off-site disposal;
 - d. Grass and other landscape clippings shall be removed from the site for off-site disposal or reuse (as feed or soil amendment).

Implementation of the foregoing measures and measures included in the Vector Control Plan would reduce the magnitude of this potential effect by requiring housekeeping and management measures. Because the setback distance to the nearby off-site residences would not be reduced with project implementation, with implementation of the above mitigation measures, the potential impact from nuisance flies would be reduced to less than significant.

X. HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?	X			
b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	X			
c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:				
(i) result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;	X			
(ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or off-site;	X			
(iii) create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or	X			
(iv) impede or redirect flood flows?	X			
d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?			X	
e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?			X	

Questions (a) and (c) Impacts on water quality: Potentially Significant Impact. Dairy facilities pose a number of potential risks to water quality, primarily related to the amount of manure and process water that they generate. Manure and process water from dairy facilities can contribute pollutants such as nutrients (nitrogen), ammonia, organic matter, sediments, pathogens, hormones, antibiotics, and total dissolved solids (salts). These pollutants, if uncontrolled, can cause several types of water quality impacts, including contamination of drinking water, impairment of irrigation systems, and impairment of surface waters. While the existing and proposed waste management systems would act to prevent groundwater contamination, the operation of the Godinho Dairy and Heifer expansion project may result in degradation of groundwater resources and potential adverse effects to surface water quality. In addition, increased solid manure exports to offsite fields associated with the proposed dairy expansion could result in off-site impacts on water quality. These potentially significant impacts will be evaluated further in the EIR for the proposed project. The EIR will include a water quality characterization and impacts analysis based on water quality data available from both on-site and nearby wells, and nearby water wells.

Question (b) Decrease groundwater supplies: Potentially Significant Impact. Irrigation sources for the project site include a CCID canal, groundwater wells and a freshwater pond (Cardoso Ag Services 2025). The proposed expansion project includes the continued use of existing water resources. A replacement domestic well in the northwest corner of APN 081-020-028 would be drilled to replace an old existing domestic well on the heifer facility parcel. It is permitted but has not yet been constructed. Water usage for the dairy could increase with the proposed dairy expansion. Project impacts on groundwater levels will be evaluated further in the EIR for the proposed project.

Question (d) Flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones: Less-than-significant Impact. The project site is not located within the FEMA designated 100-year or 500-year floodplains. Because the project site is located distant from the sea or any large reservoir, the project would not be located in an area subject to inundation hazards from seiche or tsunami. Because the project site would not be sited within a floodway, implementation of the proposed project would not risk the release of pollutants due to project inundation. Thus, no adverse effects from flooding and pollutant release would occur, no impacts would result, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (e) Conflict with water quality or sustainable groundwater management plans: Less-than-significant Impact. The project site is located within the Delta-Mendota Groundwater Subbasin. The current Basin Plan for the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins was issued in February 2019. The proposed project would be required to implement a stormwater pollution prevention plan during construction, and proposed project operations would not result in hazardous wastewater discharges. Therefore, the proposed project would not include any waste discharges that could conflict with the Basin Plan. Further, agriculture and animal confinement facilities are designated as beneficial uses of water resources in the Basin Plan.

The San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority worked with 10 neighboring GSAs to develop a joint Groundwater Sustainability Plan for the Delta-Mendota Subbasin in order to implement the SGMA requirements and achieve the sustainability goals outlined in SGMA. While the proposed project would result in an increase in groundwater use in order to water the expanded herd, the proposed project would be expected to follow the guidelines within the GSP, as applicable, to manage groundwater depletion. Therefore, the project would not conflict with or obstruct the water quality control plan or a sustainable groundwater management plan, and the potential impacts would be less than significant. No mitigation would be required.

XI. LAND USE AND PLANNING				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Physically divide an established community?				X
b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?		X		

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The land surrounding the project site and in the general vicinity is primarily developed for agricultural uses. Scattered rural residences are located in the general area of the project; most are associated with agricultural operations. The project site is designated Agricultural by the 2030 Merced County General Plan, and zoned A-1 (General Agricultural) by the Merced County Zoning Code.

Question (a) Divide an established community: No Impact. Other than scattered rural residences, there is no established community in the area of the project site. The nearest established community within the project area is the City of Los Banos, approximately 0.5 mile southeast of the Godinho active heifer facilities. Because the project would not divide a community, no adverse effects would result, and no mitigation would be necessary.

Question (b) Land use conflicts: Less-than-significant Impact with Mitigation. The project site and the area surrounding the site are designated Agricultural on the 2030 Merced County General Plan Land Use Diagram. As set forth in the 2030 Merced County General Plan, the Agricultural land use designation:

... provides for cultivated agricultural practices which rely on good soil quality, adequate water availability, and minimal slopes. This is the largest County land use designation by area in the County and is typically applied to areas on the valley floor. (Merced County 2013)

The project site and the area surrounding the site in Merced County are located in the A-1 (General Agricultural) zoning district of Merced County. The purpose of the General Agriculture zone is to provide for areas of more intensive farming operations dependent on higher quality soils, water availability, and relatively flat topography; and to host agricultural and/or industrial uses dependent on proximity to urban areas or requiring a location in sparsely populated areas. Parcels smaller than 40 acres down to a minimum of 20 acres can be considered under the General Agriculture zone where agricultural productivity of the property will not be reduced.

Animal confinement facilities such as dairies and heifer lots may be permitted in all agricultural zones within Merced County subject to approval of an Administrative Permit or Conditional Use Permit as determined by the number of off-site dwellings within the windshed, and whether animal confinement facility criteria are met. Animal confinement facilities face greater regulatory scrutiny if greater than five off-site residential dwellings are located within the windshed, defined as an area of 1,320 feet upwind to 2,640 downwind of the periphery of the animal facility, or if the animal confinement facility does not meet other locational criteria as defined by County Code Section

18.64.040 (B). For the Godinho Dairy and Heifer Ranch expansion project, there are numerous off-site residences located within the windshed of the dairy (see Figure 4), and there are 22 off-site residences located within 1,000 feet of the existing dairy and heifer ranch facility and proposed wastewater retention pond (see Figures 7a through 7c). Because there are off-site residences that are situated at a distance that is less than the setback distances established in the Merced County Code locational criteria, Merced County is considering the project under its Conditional Use Permit process.

Within Merced County, Conditional Use Permits are discretionary permits that require special review and control to ensure that the use of land is compatible with the neighborhood and surrounding residences. Land uses subject to a CUP are considered more likely to have greater impacts than uses permitted by right or uses permitted under Administrative Permits (Merced County Code Section 18.116.010 (B)). The proponents of the proposed project have made application to the County of Merced for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP25-009) to construct and operate the proposed dairy and heifer facility expansion.

No fly complaints have been reported at the Godinho Heifer Ranch and submitted to DEH (Merced County 2026a). While the existing agricultural character of the vicinity would tend to minimize incompatibility to existing uses in the project vicinity, implementation of the dairy and heifer facility expansion project could introduce an additional source of odors, flies, and other insects in the area of these residences (these potential adverse odor and nuisance insect effects are evaluated in Section VII, *Hazards and Hazardous Materials* of this Initial Study and will be evaluated in the air quality section of the EIR). The combination of these nuisance effects contributes on a cumulative level to determine land use compatibility with existing residents in the area.

Merced County regulates land use through the 2030 General Plan and Zoning Code. The EIR prepared for the Merced County ACO assessed potential land use conflicts with rural residences for new and expanding animal confinement facilities in Merced County. In efforts to minimize these conflicts and protect agricultural uses, the ACO requires a minimum setback between new or expanded animal confinement facilities and individual off-site rural residents to 1,000 feet and generally prohibits the construction of new off-site dwellings within 1,000 feet of an existing animal confinement facility, with some exceptions. According to Merced County Code Chapter 18.64.040 (B)(2), the modification or expansion of an existing facility must not decrease the existing separation distance from residentially zoned property, concentrations of five or more off-site residences, or offsite residences to less than 1,000 feet unless the off-site property owner provides written permission. Construction of the proposed freestall and loafing barns would occur outside the existing footprint of active animal confinement operations. While there are off-site residences within 1,000 feet, the dairy and heifer facility expansion would not reduce the existing distance to these residences (see Figures 7a through 7c). The proposed expansion would not reduce the distance to less than 1,000 feet for any off-site residence currently greater than 1,000 feet from existing active dairy or heifer facilities.

The ACO also prohibits new dairies within one-half mile of urban areas, areas zoned for residential uses, concentrations of rural residences, and parks (Merced County Code Chapter 18.64.040 (B)(1)(a)). According to Merced County Code Chapter 18.64.040 (B)(2), if the animal confinement facility is located within the minimum setback distance, the modification or expansion of an existing facility must not decrease the existing separation distance from these areas. There are no residentially zoned areas or concentrations of rural residences within the 0.5-mile setback distance (Merced

County GIS 2026). The Planning Area boundary of the City of Los Banos is located approximately 0.42 mile southeast of the Godinho active heifer facilities and the city limits is approximately 0.9 mile southeast of the Godinho active heifer facilities. The proposed expansion would not decrease this setback distance (see Figure 10).

While no official nuisance complaints have been reported at the project site, because the active animal confinement facilities are located less than 1,000 feet from several off-site residences, there would be an increased potential for nuisance conditions at these residences with implementation of the proposed dairy and heifer facility expansion, and implementation of Mitigation Measure HAZ-1 would be required.

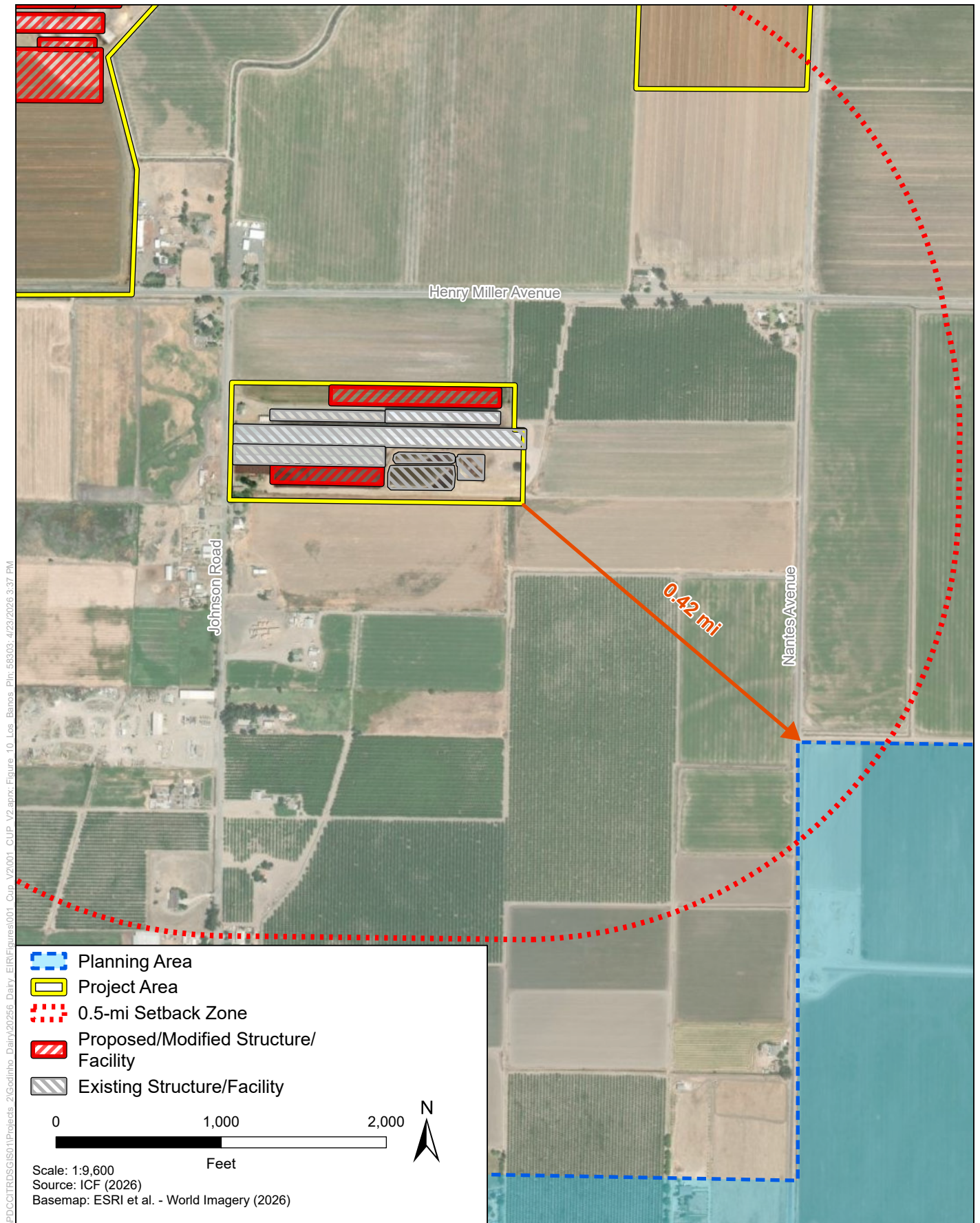


Figure 10
Distance of Los Banos City Planning Area to Active Animal Confinement Facilities

Implementation of the nuisance control measures set forth in Mitigation Measure HAZ-1 and measures included in the Godinho Heifer Ranch Vector Control Plan would reduce the magnitude of this potential effect by requiring housekeeping and management measures. Because the setback distance to the nearby off-site residences would not be reduced with project implementation, with implementation of the above mitigation measure, the potential impact from nuisance conditions would be reduced to less than significant.

XII. MINERAL RESOURCES				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?				X
b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?				X

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The majority of the land area of Merced County lies within the Central Valley physiographic province, which is dominated by significant amounts of overburden soils that are alluvial in nature. Less than 30 percent of Merced County lies in higher topographic areas, away from the alluvium and closer to bedrock conditions. Very few traditional hard rock mines exist in the county (Merced County 2013d).

There are no known areas with a high likelihood of known significant sand and gravel resources in the vicinity of the proposed project. No significant Mineral Resource Zones or mineral resource production areas are located in or adjacent to the project area. The western portion of Merced County includes the following aggregate resource areas: Garzas Creek, Basalt Hill, Los Banos Valley, and Los Banos Creek Fan. According to the *2030 Merced County General Plan Background Report* (Figure 8-10), the project site is not located in an area of sand and gravel resources (Merced County 2013d). The California Geological Survey indicates that the proposed project is not located within an Aggregate Production Area (DOC, CGS 2018).

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Questions (a) and (b) Loss of mineral resources of value and/or delineated on land use plans: No Impact. No important mineral deposits, Mineral Resource Zones, or existing or previous mines are located on the project site or in the surrounding area. Because there are no mineral resources or resource protection zones in the vicinity of the project site, there would be no loss of availability of known mineral resources. No adverse effect would result, and no mitigation would be required.

XIII. NOISE

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project result in:				
a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?	X			
b) Generation of excessive ground-borne vibration or ground-borne noise levels?	X			
c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan, or where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?				X

Questions (a) and (b) Noise and Vibration Impacts: Potentially Significant Impact.

The proposed project may result in potentially significant impacts due to its operations near existing off-site residences. In order to assess these impacts, the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will include a detailed noise and vibration analysis. This analysis will focus on evaluating the significance of effects to sensitive receptors, considering both construction and operational activities associated with the expansion of the dairy and heifer ranch.

The evaluation will be based on predicted noise and vibration exposures at neighboring sensitive receptors. It will also assess the project's consistency with the standards outlined in the Merced County General Plan EIR and the Merced County Animal Confinement Ordinance Program EIR. Should the analysis identify significant impacts, appropriate mitigation measures will be incorporated to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level.

Question (c) Excessive noise levels near airports: No Impact. The Los Banos Municipal Airport is located approximately 2.1 miles south of the project site. There are no existing public or private airports or airstrips within two miles of the proposed project site. Since the project site would be approximately 2.1 miles from the nearest public airport, and noise levels from airport operations do not exceed Merced County General Plan standards at the project site, workers at the project site would not be exposed to excessive noise levels. No impact would result, and no mitigation would be required.

XIV. POPULATION AND HOUSING				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?				X
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?				X

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Question (a) Induce unplanned population growth: No Impact. The project site is located in an agricultural region developed with other animal confinement operations in the vicinity. The proposed project would not result in a new or different type of use for the area, nor does the project create or improve any infrastructure serving the site or region. The proposed project is consistent with Merced County land use plans, and no modification of land use and development policies would be necessary to accommodate the proposed dairy and heifer ranch expansion project.

There are currently as many as 20 full-time employees on site at one time with the existing dairy operation. With the expansion proposed by this Conditional Use Permit, the number of employees is expected to remain the same. Up to five individuals may be on site during weekly veterinarian checks. In February 2026, the labor force in Merced County totaled 125,200 persons, with an official unemployment rate of 10.8 percent (or 13,600 unemployed persons) (Employment Development Department 2026). The continuing labor needs of the project can be accommodated by this existing workforce. Because no new employees would be added as a result of the proposed project, there would be no demand for additional housing; existing and planned housing resources within Merced County would be sufficient.

The proposed project would not result in an increase in the county's population; implementation of the project would not result in the exceedance of population projections or result in any significant growth inducing effects. The proposed dairy and heifer ranch expansion project would not be expected to result in substantial new growth in the project vicinity. Therefore, the proposed project would not induce substantial direct or indirect population growth. There would be no impact, and no mitigation would be necessary.

Question (b) Displace substantial numbers of people or housing: No Impact. There are several residences located at both facilities. The proposed project would not affect the existing residences, and no new housing is proposed. There would be no impact on available housing units in Merced County. In 2024, the last year for which data is available, there were 92,949 housing units, 54 percent were owner-occupied, and 520 building permits were pulled (US Census Bureau 2024). Implementation of the project would not displace any people or existing housing units. There would be no impact, and no mitigation would be necessary.

XV. PUBLIC SERVICES

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives of any of the public services:				
a) Fire protection?			X	
b) Police protection?			X	
c) Schools?			X	
d) Parks?			X	
e) Other facilities?			X	

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Public services provided in the project area include fire, police, hospital, school, library, and park services.

There are no public facilities located within the immediate project vicinity. The unincorporated area outside the Los Banos city limits depends on fire protection from the Merced County Fire Department; the closest fire station is located in Los Banos, approximately 2.5 miles to the south. The Merced County Sheriff's Department provides police protection in the unincorporated areas of Merced County. The nearest schools are located approximately 1.5 miles away in the community of Los Banos. Three hospitals provide medical services to county residents; Memorial Hospital in Los Banos is closest to the project site. Merced County Library services are available at the Los Banos branch located on Seventh Street in Los Banos. Park services are discussed in more detail in Section XV, *Recreation*. Utility services are discussed in more detail in Section XIX, *Utilities and Service Systems*.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Questions (a) through (e) New or physically altered governmental public service facilities: Less-than-significant Impact. Implementation of the proposed dairy and heifer ranch expansion would include construction on the project site of approximately 243,750 square feet of new support buildings. The proposed project is located in an area with rural levels/standards of fire protection. In response to this common condition in agricultural areas of the county, the Merced County Fire Department generally imposes requirements for on-site water storage for fire protection.

Compliance with measures set forth by the Fire Department would be required as conditions of approval and would reduce fire risk and hazards to levels found acceptable by the Merced County Fire Department. Therefore, there would be no increase or change in the demand for fire service that would require the provision of new or physically altered fire facilities.

No feature of the project would result in the need for new or altered facilities for police protection, schools, parks, libraries, or health services. Because no new residences would be constructed, and no additional employees would be added, no increase in population is expected to result from the proposed project. No feature of the proposed project would pose unusual police protection

demands. Therefore, there would be no increase in the demand for public services such as police facilities, schools, parks, libraries, or health services that would require the construction of new facilities or physically altered facilities. This would have a less-than-significant impact, and no mitigation would be necessary.

XVI. RECREATION				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood or regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?				X
b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?				X

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Merced County contains several federal, State, and county parks and recreation areas. Aside from parks in the county, there are many public open space areas as well.

- There are three National Wildlife Refuges located in Merced County: the Merced National Wildlife Refuge, the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, and the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge. The San Luis National Wildlife Refuge is nearest the site of the proposed project, approximately six miles to the northeast.
- The State of California Department of Parks and Recreation operates six parks in Merced County. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife operates seven wildlife areas. The proposed project is located between the Volta Wildlife Area to the northwest and the Los Banos Wildlife Area to the east.
- The Merced County Parks and Recreation Department maintains a variety of parklands throughout the county. County maintained parklands are divided into four basic classes: regional parks, community parks, dual-use parks, and neighborhood parks. There are a total of 21 parks owned and/or operated by Merced County (Merced County 2013e).

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Questions (a) and (b) Increase park use, construct or expand recreational facilities: No Impact. While no existing public recreational facilities are located on the project site, there are several park and open space resources in the vicinity. Implementation of the project would not directly affect the provision or demand for any recreation. There would be no increase in the use of existing neighborhood or regional parks or other recreational facilities that would cause or accelerate the physical deterioration of such facilities. The proposed project does not include recreational facilities, nor does it require the construction or expansion of such facilities. Thus, no significant adverse impacts on recreation would occur with implementation of the proposed project, and no mitigation would be required.

XVII. TRANSPORTATION

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?			X	
b) Would the project conflict with or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?			X	
c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?			X	
d) Result in inadequate emergency access?			X	

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The project site is located in areas dominated by agricultural uses. Vehicle access to the project site is via Wilson Road, Johnson Road and Henry Miller Avenue, a major collector roadway. SR 165 to the east and SR 152 to the south are arterial roadways that provide regional access to the site. There are no alternative transportation facilities, such as bus, bicycle, or pedestrian travel routes, in the vicinity of the proposed project.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Question (a) Conflict with local circulation plans: Less-than-significant Impact. The proposed project includes the construction of several new dairy support buildings, feed storage area and wastewater retention pond. Construction of the proposed project would be considered temporary over an approximate five-year period. Construction deliveries would be considered temporary construction traffic. Following implementation of the proposed project, project operations would result in an estimated increase over existing conditions of approximately 4.2 trips per day.

The proposed project use would be considered to be consistent with existing General Plan land use designation with issuance of Conditional Use Permit CUP25-009 (see Section XI, *Land Use and Planning* of this Initial Study). Because of the existing low levels of traffic in the vicinity, and because minimal new trips would be generated by the proposed project expansion, congestion on nearby roadways would not increase. There would be no reduction of the existing Levels of Service on nearby roads, nor would the project conflict with any applicable congestion management plan. Because there are no transit, bicycle, or pedestrian facilities in the vicinity of the proposed project, improvements would not result in the modification of any transit, bicycle, or pedestrian travel route. This would have a less-than-significant impact, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (b) Conflict with CEQA Guidelines regarding analysis of transportation impacts: Less-than-significant Impact. Section 15064.3, subdivision (b) of the CEQA Guidelines describes criteria for analyzing transportation impacts. The proposed project would result in an increase of approximately 4.2 total trips from existing operations. Many local agencies have developed screening thresholds to indicate when detailed analysis is needed. As set forth in the Governor's

Office of Planning and Research Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA (December 2018), “absent substantial evidence indicating that a project would generate a potentially significant level of VMT, or inconsistency with a Sustainable Communities Strategy or general plan, projects that generate or attract fewer than 110 trips per day generally may be assumed to cause a less-than-significant transportation impact.” Because the project would be considered consistent with the Merced County General Plan, and the project would not generate a significant number of trips and associated vehicle miles traveled, a less-than-significant impact would occur, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (c) Increase hazards due to geometric design feature: Less-than-significant Impact. Construction activities for the proposed project would not include work on any public roadway. Implementation of the proposed project would not result in any permanent changes to the design features or uses of local roadways, or the construction of any new roadways. There would be no increase to hazards related to a geometric design feature, or due to incompatible uses. A less than-significant impact would result, and no mitigation would be required.

Question (d) Inadequate emergency access: Less than significant Impact. The Merced County Fire Department maintains standards for access to roadways to provide for adequate emergency access to the project site. Construction activities associated with the proposed project would be temporary in nature and would not interrupt emergency access to or from the project site. Because construction effects on traffic and emergency circulation for the proposed project would be temporary and well managed, there would be a less-than-significant impact to emergency access, and no mitigation would be necessary.

XVIII. TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:				
a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historic Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k), or	X			
b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.	X			

REGULATORY SETTING

Effective July 1, 2015, Assembly Bill 52 amended CEQA to require that: 1) a lead agency provide notice to any California Native American tribes that have requested notice of projects proposed by the lead agency; and 2) for any tribe that responded to the notice within 30 days of receipt with a

request for consultation, the lead agency must consult with the tribe. Topics that may be addressed during consultation include Tribal Cultural Resources (TCR), the potential significance of project impacts, type of environmental document that should be prepared, and possible mitigation measures.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Summary of Assembly Bill 52 Compliance

Section 21080.3.1 (b) of the Public Resources Code states that:

“... the lead agency shall begin consultation with a California Native American tribe that is traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of the proposed project if: (1) the California Native American tribe requested to the lead agency, in writing, to be informed by the lead agency through formal notification of proposed project in the geographic area that is traditionally and culturally affiliated with the tribe...”

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

AB 52 established that a substantial adverse change to a TCR has a significant effect on the environment. In assessing substantial adverse change, the County must determine whether or not substantial evidence of a TCR exists within the project area. If substantial evidence of a TCR exists, the County would then determine whether or not the project would adversely affect the qualities of the known tribal cultural resource.

Questions (a) and (b) Affect CRHR resources, or significant California Native American Tribal resources: Less-than-significant Impact. Ground-disturbing activities associated with construction and operation of the Godinho Dairy Expansion Project have the potential to affect tribal cultural resources, if present. Pursuant to Assembly Bill (AB) 52 and Public Resources Code Section 21080.3.1 et seq., Merced County will initiate notification and consultation procedures with California Native American tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of the project. In addition, the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) will be contacted to conduct a records search of the Sacred Lands File.

At the time of preparation of this Initial Study, AB 52 consultation is ongoing and will be completed prior to circulation of the DEIR. Information obtained through consultation will be considered in evaluating the presence and significance of tribal cultural resources and in developing appropriate avoidance, minimization, or mitigation measures, if warranted.

Consistent with CEQA Guidelines Appendix G and Public Resources Code Section 21074, the DEIR will evaluate potential impacts to tribal cultural resources based on the results of AB 52 consultation, the NAHC Sacred Lands File search, and other relevant information obtained during the environmental review process. The significance of impacts to tribal cultural resources and the need for mitigation measures will be determined following completion of consultation and incorporation of the consultation results into the environmental analysis of the DEIR.

XIX. UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?			X	
b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry, and multiple dry years?			X	
c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?			X	
d) Generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?			X	
e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?			X	

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

There are three single-family residences located at the heifer facility and four at the existing dairy (APNs 070-180-044, 070-180-028 and 081-020-028). These residences are occupied by employees of both facilities. Domestic water is delivered to the sites by on-site water wells. Each of the residences is provided with an individual on-site septic system. Stormwater runoff from roofed areas is routed to adjacent fields on site. Solid waste collection and disposal are provided by private service.

The proposed dairy and heifer facilities expansion would rely on existing utilities, including domestic water, stormwater, and electrical services. No additional utilities would be required.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Because confined animal facilities, including dairies and heifer ranches, would not require additional public facilities beyond those typically provided in agricultural areas, implementation of the proposed dairy and heifer facilities expansion project would not be expected to increase the demand for public facilities beyond the levels provided and planned for by public utilities.

Questions (a) through (c) Construct or relocate new service system facilities, sufficient water supply, adequate wastewater treatment capacity: Less-than-significant Impact. A new well on the north side of the heifer facility just north of the existing residence along Johnson Road was previously permitted with CUP19-006 but has not yet been constructed. The proposed well would function as a replacement well to the existing, older domestic well to serve the residences and drinking water for the herd. The proposed dairy and heifer ranch expansion project would not involve the construction of any new septic systems. The proposed project would not require the construction of new community water or wastewater treatment facilities.

All stormwater generated at the project site from existing and proposed areas with impermeable surfaces is, and would continue to be, collected and routed to wastewater storage ponds onsite. A new wastewater retention pond is proposed at the northern end of APN 070-201-010. Therefore, no adverse effects to storm drainage are expected, and no needs for, or modifications to, storm drainage systems in the project vicinity are necessary.

Based on the information above, implementation of the proposed dairy and heifer ranch expansion project would not result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater, storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities. This would have a less than-significant impact, and no mitigation would be required.

Questions (d) and (e) Solid waste: Less-than-significant Impact. The proposed project consists of construction of expanded dairy and heifer ranch facilities. The provision of solid waste collection service to serve the proposed project would be subject to the normal tariffs and requirements of the service provider and would not result in the need for any major new systems or substantial alterations to these utility systems. It would not generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals. There would be no change to existing conditions that would result in non-compliance with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste. This would have a less-than-significant impact, and no mitigation would be required.

XX. WILDFIRE				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:				
a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evaluation plan?				X
b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?				X
c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?				X
d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?				X

According to CAL FIRE, the project area is within the LRA, meaning the financial responsibility of preventing and suppressing wildfires is primarily the responsibility of a local agency (city, county, city and county, or district). Therefore, the project site is not within a Very High or High FHSZ (CAL FIRE 2026).

Questions (a) through (d) Wildfire: No Impact. The project site is not located in or near State Responsibility Areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones. It is located in an existing low-density agricultural area, and the threat of wildland fire has been determined to be unlikely (CAL FIRE 2026). Because the proposed project is not located in or near a State Responsibility Area nor on lands classified as Very High FHSZ, no impact would occur and no mitigation would be required.

XXI. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE				
	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	X			
b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (“Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects)	X			
c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	X			

Questions (a) Degrade quality of the environment, and (b) Cumulatively considerable impacts: Potentially Significant Impact. As discussed in this Initial Study, the proposed Godinho Dairy Expansion project has the potential to impact air quality, biological resources, GHG emissions, hydrology and water quality, noise, and potentially TCRs. These would be potentially significant impacts to be evaluated further in the EIR for the Godinho Dairy Expansion project.

In addition, the proposed project may contribute to cumulative effects in these areas. The project has been determined not to have significant project level effects for any additional environmental issue. Therefore, implementation of the project would not contribute to any cumulative effects in these other areas. Because of potential cumulative impacts on the areas listed above, such impacts will be evaluated further in the EIR for the proposed project.

Question (c) Adversely affect human beings: Potentially Significant Impact. Because of the potential environmental impacts identified in this Initial Study, the proposed Godinho Dairy Expansion project may have the potential to cause substantial adverse effects on human beings. This would have a potentially significant impact to be evaluated further in the EIR for the proposed project.

3. PREPARERS OF THE INITIAL STUDY

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4. LITERATURE CITED

The following documents were referred to as information sources during preparation of this document. They are available for public review at the web addresses shown after the listing. All documents without an internet address are available at the County of Merced, Community and Economic Development Department 2222 'M' Street, Merced, California 95340.

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DETERMINATION

On the basis of this initial evaluation:

I find that the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.

I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because revisions in the project have been made by or agreed to by the project applicant. A NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.

X I find that the proposed project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.

I find that the proposed project MAY have a “potentially significant impact” or “potentially significant unless mitigated” impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.

I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, nothing further is required.

Signature

Mark Hamilton

Date 10/2/2026

Mark Hamilton, Planner III
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Community and Economic Development Department