



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Special Environmental Resource Concerns

Clean Air Act
Criteria Pollutants

Clean Air Act
Regional Visibility
Degradation

Clean Water Act

Coastal Zone
Management
Areas

Coral Reefs

Cultural
Resources

Endangered
and Threatened
Species

Environmental
Justice

Essential Fish
Habitat

Floodplain
Management

Invasive
Species

Migratory Birds

Prime and
Unique
Farmlands

Riparian Areas

Wetlands

Wild and Scenic
Rivers

Prime and Unique Farmlands

Prime and Unique Farmlands

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) was passed by Congress as part of the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 (Public law 97-98). The FPPA is intended to minimize the impact Federal programs have on the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. For the purpose of FPPA, farmland includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and land of statewide or local importance.

What is it?

Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, and without intolerable soil erosion, as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture. It may include lands currently used to produce livestock and/or timber. **Unique farmland** is land other than prime farmland that is used for production of specific high-value food and fiber crops, as determined by the Secretary. Examples of such crops include citrus, tree nuts, olives, cranberries, fruits, and vegetables. **Farmland that is of statewide or local importance other than prime or unique farmland** is used for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, or oilseed crops, as determined by the appropriate State or unit of local government agency or agencies, with the approval of the Secretary of Agriculture.

Why is it important?

Projects are subject to FPPA requirements if they may irreversibly convert farmland (directly or indirectly) to nonagricultural use and are completed by a Federal agency or with assistance from a Federal agency, including NRCS.

What can be done about it?

NRCS must use the criteria provided in regulations found at 7 CFR Section 658.5 to identify and take into account the adverse effects of Federal programs on the protection of farmland. As well as evaluating the effects of our own actions upon farmland, NRCS must assist Federal agencies to consider alternative actions, as appropriate, that could lessen such adverse effects on farmland conversion to nonagricultural uses. NRCS uses a land evaluation and site assessment (LESA) system to establish a farmland conversion impact rating scores. This score is used as an indicator for the project sponsor to consider alternative sites if the potential adverse impacts on the farmland exceed the recommended allowable level.

Prime and Unique Farmlands at a Glance

Problems / Indicators - Proposed farmland conversion	
Causes	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Proposed land use changes/conversion of agricultural landsGround disturbing/land clearing activitiesConstruction of infrastructure projectsExurban development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Conduct LESA for conversion impact scoreShare result with cooperating Federal agency proposing action (normally for NEPA analysis)Offer alternatives (relocation) for consideration if adverse impacts to prime, unique, or locally important agricultural lands

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