

TESTIMONY FOR PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING ON 9/20/2007

My name is Harriet Hill, I reside at 1444 McFarlan and work at the Humboldt County Division of Environmental Health. I am focusing my comments tonight on the need for a strong agricultural element in the General Plan.

I moved to Humboldt County 8 years ago from the Bay Area, because of its vibrant community life, and the magnificent natural beauty of the landscape. Every day, when I drive past the expanses of bay, farmland, and forest, I am grateful to be living here. When I first got here, I was amazed to see so much intact dairy land outside of Ferndale and Arcata. I grew up in America's Dairyland, Wisconsin, and have witnessed firsthand the impacts of agricultural conversion. So much of the prime dairy land around Madison, my hometown, has been lost to residential and business park development. I am here to voice my strong support of General Plan measures that will prevent a similar fate in Humboldt County.

An article in last week's North Coast Journal stated that Humboldt County currently imports 80% of its food. But I believe this is changing; indeed, a number of factors indicate that we may soon be importing considerably less food. For example, this month has been declared local food month, and last night, 2 potlucks were held in the county where all food being served was grown within a 250-mile radius of Arcata or Garberville. Humboldt County hosts an astonishing 13 farmers' markets each week during the summer season. Eureka and Arcata have 4 major natural foods stores, all of which feature local produce and products. It seems we have an unusually robust demand for local food in this county of only 130,000. Given the recent resurgence of hoof and mouth disease and mad cow disease in England, the continuing rash of contaminated food products from China, and the epidemic of foods found to have dangerous levels of E. coli produced in other parts of California and the U.S., we have even more incentive to buy our produce, meat and dairy from farms and ranches we can see, from people we know. We are so fortunate to have our own supplies of grass-fed beef and organic ice cream! These great Humboldt County agricultural products and many others should become an increasingly easy sell to urbanites to the south, especially given our reputation for relatively pristine land and clean water.

Finally, our ag lands are not only scenic and pleasing to humans, they provide key habitat for wildlife, as anyone visiting the farms on the Eel River or Arcata Bottoms can see. They also help to provide flood control, water recharge and purification, local employment, and many other important functions.

Susan Ornelas, a Humboldt County agricultural consultant, says that we currently have enough ag land to sustain each and every county resident. Let's not lose it! I strongly encourage adoption of Alternative A as the preferred plan alternative. I also support the additional policies that would provide the most protection to agriculture and limit residential development, such as no net loss of AE land, the formation of an Open Space District, and the creation of greenbelts and ag buffers. The General Plan should make every effort to protect our unique local agricultural industry – a most precious and valuable resource.