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## 4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This section provides an overview of existing agricultural resources within the study area and identifies applicable Federal, State, and local policies related to the conservation of agricultural lands (see Section 4.2.1). This includes a summary of the production outputs, soil resources and adjacent operations potentially affected by the projects. The impact assessment in Section 4.2.2 provides an evaluation of potential adverse effects to agricultural resources based on criteria derived from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines in conjunction with actions proposed in Chapter 3, Project Description. Section 4.2.3 provides a discussion of residual impacts, if any.

No forestry resources are present within the study area and, therefore, this section focuses on issues related to agricultural resources.

### 4.2.1 Environmental Setting

In 2010, Imperial County (County) was ranked ninth among the 58 counties in the State of California with respect to production of agricultural goods, earning \$1,684,522,000 for the State's economy (California Department of Food and Agriculture 2010). Vegetable and melon crops were the top commodities in Imperial County producing \$809,126,000 in the year 2010. Field crops and livestock were the next two largest commodities generating \$360,139,000 and \$321,022,000, respectively, for Imperial County (Imperial County Agricultural Commissioner 2010).

#### 4.2.1.1 Regulatory Setting

This section identifies and summarizes federal, state, and local laws, policies, and regulations that are applicable to the projects.

#### Federal

##### Farmland Protection Policy Act

The purpose of the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) is to minimize the extent to which Federal programs contribute to the unnecessary conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. The FPPA also stipulates that federal programs be compatible with state, local and private efforts to protect farmland. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is charged with oversight of the FPPA.

#### State

##### California Land Conservation Act

The Williamson Act (California Land Conservation Act, California Government Code, Section 51200 et seq.) is a statewide mechanism for the preservation of agricultural land and open space land. The Act provides a comprehensive method for local governments to protect farmland and open space by allowing lands in agricultural use to be placed under contract (agricultural preserve) between a local government and a land owner.

Under the provisions of the Williamson Act (California Land Conservation Act 1965, Section 51200), landowners contract with the County to maintain agricultural or open space use of their lands in return for reduced property tax assessment. The contract is self-renewing and the landowner may notify the County at any time of intent to withdraw the land from its preserve status. Withdrawal involves a ten-year period of tax adjustment to full market value before protected open space can be converted to urban uses. Consequently, land under a Williamson Act Contract can be in either a renewal status or a nonrenewable status. Lands with a nonrenewable status indicate the farmer has withdrawn from the Williamson Act Contract and is waiting for a period of tax adjustment for the land to reach its full market value.

Nonrenewable and cancellation lands are candidates for potential urbanization within a period of ten years.

There are four active Williamson Act Contracts within the study area, which are illustrated in Figure 4.2-1. Agricultural Preserve 115 includes the northern portions of Calexico Solar Farm 1, Phase A (CSF1(A)) (Assessors Parcel Numbers (APN) 052-210-001 and 002). Agricultural Preserve 117 includes the southern portions of Calexico Solar Farm 1, Phase B (CSF1(B)) (APNs 052-210-038 and 039). Agricultural Preserve 160 includes the southern portions of Calexico Solar Farm 2, Phase B (CSF2(B)) (APNs 052-180-022, 050, and 051). Agricultural Preserve 159 includes the northeastern portion of Calexico Solar Farm 2, Phase A (CSF2(A)) (APN 059-110-007). Petitions for cancellation of these contracts were filed within the County in September and October of 2011.

It is important to note that the continuation of the Williamson Act program within Imperial County is now in question as a result of a decision by the Board of Supervisors to discontinue funding for the program for 2012. This decision will essentially result in the non-renewal of all active Williamson Act contracts within the County starting January 1, 2012. Although landowners have the option of filing a protest against non-renewal, this option only allows them to keep their Williamson Act value until there is less than six years remaining in the non-renewal phase-out. Beyond four years, current tax incentives would no longer apply. This issue is discussed further in the impact analysis.

### Farmland Security Zones

In August 1998, the Williamson Act's Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) provisions were enacted with the passage of Senate Bill 1182 (Costa, Chapter 353, Statutes of 1998). This sub-program, dubbed the "Super Williamson Act," enables agricultural landowners to enter into contracts with the County for 20-year increments with an additional 35 percent tax benefit over and above the standard Williamson Act contract. As of 2010, no applications have been made for FSZs within the study area.

### California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The California Department of Conservation (DOC), under the Division of Land Resource Protection, has set up the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), which monitors the conversion of the state's farmland to and from agricultural use. The map series identifies eight classifications and uses a minimum mapping unit size of ten acres. The program also produces a biannual report on the amount of land converted from agricultural to non-agricultural use. The program maintains an inventory of state agricultural land and updates its "Important Farmland Series Maps" every two years. Table 4.2-1 provides a summary of agricultural land within Imperial County converted to non-agricultural uses during the time frame from 2006 to 2008 (DOC 2008). Figure 4.2-1 illustrates the FMMP designations for the study area.

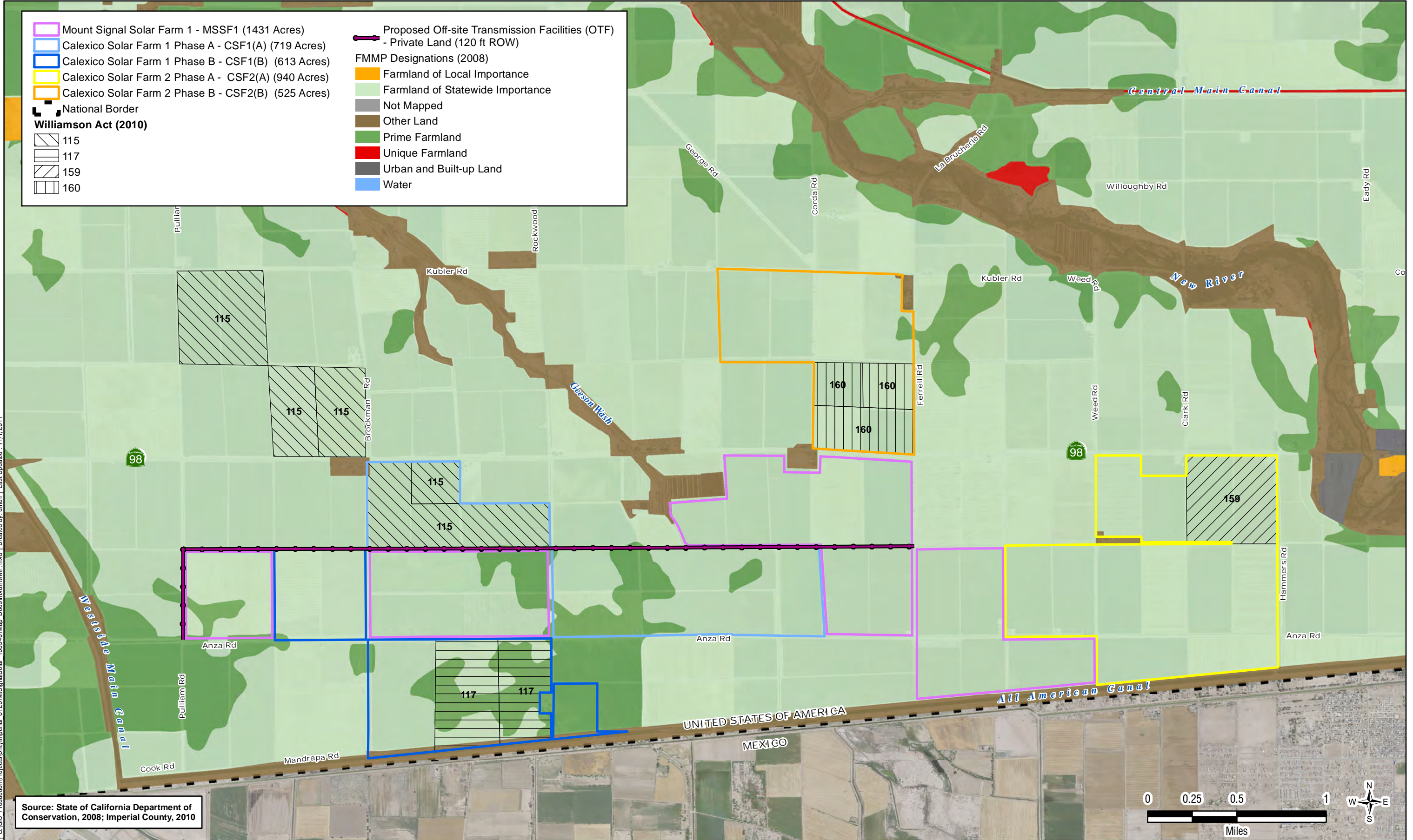
**TABLE 4.2-1. IMPERIAL COUNTY CHANGE IN AGRICULTURAL LAND USE SUMMARY (2006-2008)**

Land Use Category	Total Acreage Inventoried		2006-2008 Acreage Changes			
	2006	2008	Acres Lost (-)	Acres Gained (+)	Total Acreage Changed	Net Acreage Changed
Prime Farmland	196,176	195,589	1,000	407	1,407	-593
Farmland of Statewide Importance	311,645	311,048	2,243	1,646	3,889	-597
Unique Farmland	2,281	2,196	120	35	155	-85
Farmland of Local Importance	33,036	32,109	2,444	1,517	3,961	-927
<b>Important Farmland Subtotal</b>	<b>543,138</b>	<b>540,942</b>	<b>5,807</b>	<b>3,605</b>	<b>9,412</b>	<b>-2,202</b>
Grazing Land	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Agricultural Land Subtotal</b>	<b>543,138</b>	<b>540,942</b>	<b>5,807</b>	<b>3,605</b>	<b>9,412</b>	<b>-2,202</b>
Urban and Built-Up Land	26,897	27,709	272	1,084	1,356	812
Other Land	457,510	458,829	890	2,273	3,163	1,383
Water Area	1,022	1,029	0	7	7	7
<b>Total Area Inventoried</b>	<b>1,028,567</b>	<b>1,028,509</b>	<b>6,969</b>	<b>6,969</b>	<b>13,938</b>	<b>0</b>

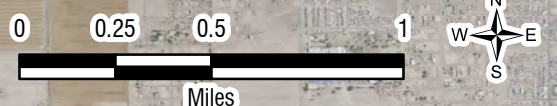
Source: DOC 2008.

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	Mount Signal Solar Farm 1 - MSSF1 (1431 Acres)		Proposed Off-site Transmission Facilities (OTF)
	Calexico Solar Farm 1 Phase A - CSF1(A) (719 Acres)		Private Land (120 ft ROW)
	Calexico Solar Farm 1 Phase B - CSF1(B) (613 Acres)		FMMP Designations (2008)
	Calexico Solar Farm 2 Phase A - CSF2(A) (940 Acres)		Farmland of Local Importance
	Calexico Solar Farm 2 Phase B - CSF2(B) (525 Acres)		Farmland of Statewide Importance
	National Border		Not Mapped
	Williamson Act (2010)		Other Land
			Prime Farmland
			Unique Farmland
			Urban and Built-up Land
			Water



Source: State of California Department of Conservation, 2008; Imperial County, 2010



**FMMP and Williamson Act Contracted Lands**  
Figure 4.2-1





## Local

### County of Imperial General Plan

The Agricultural Element of the County's General Plan serves as the primary policy statement for implementing development policies for agricultural land use in Imperial County. The goals, objectives, implementation programs, and policies found in the Agricultural Element provide direction for new development as well as government actions and programs. Imperial County's Goals and Objectives are intended to serve as long-term principles and policy statements to guide agricultural use decision-making and uphold the community's ideals.

Agriculture has been the single most important economic activity in the County throughout its history. The County recognizes the area as one of the finest agricultural areas in the world due to several environmental and cultural factors including good soils, a year-round growing season, the availability of adequate water transported from the Colorado River, extensive areas committed to agricultural production, a gently sloping topography, and a climate that is well-suited for growing crops and raising livestock. The Agricultural Element in the County General Plan demonstrates the long-term commitment by the County to the full promotion, management, use, and development and protection of agricultural production, while allowing logical, organized growth of urban areas (County of Imperial, as amended through 2008).

The County's Agricultural Element identifies several Implementation Programs and Policies for the preservation of agricultural resources. The Agricultural Element recognizes that the County can and should take additional steps to provide further protection for agricultural operations and at the same time provide for logical, organized growth of urban areas. The County must be specific and consistent about which lands will be maintained for the production of food and fiber and for support of the County's economic base. The County's strategy and overall framework for maintaining agriculture includes the following policy directed at the preservation of Important Farmland:

The overall economy of the County is expected to be dependent upon the agricultural industry for the foreseeable future. As such, all agricultural land in the County is considered as Important Farmland, as defined by Federal and State agencies, and should be reserved for agricultural uses. Agricultural land may be converted to non-agricultural uses only where a clear and immediate need can be demonstrated, such as requirements for urban housing, commercial facilities, or employment opportunities. All existing agricultural land will be preserved for irrigation agriculture, livestock production, aquaculture, and other agriculture-related uses except for non-agricultural uses identified in this General Plan or in previously adopted City General Plans.

The following program is provided in the Agricultural Element:

No agricultural land designated except as provided in Exhibit C shall be removed from the Agriculture category except where needed for use by a public agency, for geothermal purposes, where a mapping error may have occurred, or where a clear long term economic benefit to the County can be demonstrated through the planning and environmental review process. The Board (or Planning Commission) shall be required to prepare and make specific findings and circulate same for 60 days (30 days for parcels considered under Exhibit C of this element) before granting final approval of any proposal which removes land from the Agriculture category.

Also, the following policy addresses Development Patterns and Locations on Agricultural Land:

"Leapfrogging" or "checkerboard" patterns of development have intensified recently and result in significant impacts to the efficient and economic production of adjacent agricultural land. It is a policy of the County that leapfrogging will not be allowed in the

future. All new non-agricultural development will be confined to areas identified in this plan for such purposes or in Cities' adopted Spheres of Influence, where new development must adjoin existing urban uses. Non-agricultural residential, commercial, or industrial uses will only be permitted if they adjoin at least one side of an existing urban use, and only if they do not significantly impact the ability to economically and conveniently farm adjacent agricultural land.

Agricultural Element Programs that address "leapfrogging" or "checkerboard" development include:

All non-agricultural uses in any land use category shall be analyzed during the subdivision, zoning, and environmental impact review process for their potential impact on the movement of agricultural equipment and products on roads located in the Agriculture category, and for other existing agricultural conditions which might impact the projects, such as noise, dust, or odors.

The Planning and Development Services Department shall review all proposed development projects to assure that any new residential or non-agricultural commercial uses located on agriculturally zoned land, except land designated as a Specific Plan Area, be adjoined on at least one entire property line to an area of existing urban uses. Developments which do not meet this criteria should not be approved.

Table 4.2-2 provides a General Plan goal and policy consistency evaluation for the projects.

### **County of Imperial Right to Farm Ordinance No. 1031**

The purpose and intent of the County's Right to Farm Ordinance is to reduce the loss to the County of its agricultural resources by clarifying the circumstances under which agricultural operations may be considered a nuisance. The ordinance includes a requirement for disclosure of agricultural operations as part of real estate transactions that may occur in the vicinity of agricultural operations.

### **Imperial County Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Solar Generating and Transmission Facilities on Agricultural Lands**

The Imperial County Planning Department prepared a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was issued in September 2011 with the intent of providing clarification in relation to the County's review of solar projects proposed on agricultural lands. The MOU provides direction to applicants in terms of the standard conditions of approval and supporting mitigation requirements that will be applied to new solar projects proposed on agricultural lands within unincorporated portions of the County. This MOU provides specific direction in terms of mitigation requirements for non-prime and prime farmland, Williamson Act contracted lands, and fire protection for transmission facilities.

#### **4.2.1.2 Existing Conditions**

##### **Agricultural Cropping Patterns**

Much of the land base in the vicinity of and within the study area is considered highly productive farmland where irrigation water is available. Farming operations in this area generally consist of medium to large-scale mono-cropping systems with related operational facilities. Crops generally cultivated in the study area may include alfalfa, barley, and/or Bermuda grass in any given year. Row and vegetable crops are also prominent in the study area. Areas further to the north are also utilized for irrigated agricultural production and non-irrigated pasture for cattle grazing. No farming generally occurs in areas to the west of the study area, including areas within the New 230 kilovolt (kV) Transmission Facility for BLM Utility Corridor "N."

**TABLE 4.2-2. PROJECT CONSISTENCY WITH APPLICABLE GENERAL PLAN AGRICULTURAL POLICIES**

General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
Goal 1. All Important Farmland, including the categories of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance, as defined by Federal and State agencies, should be reserved for agricultural uses.	Consistent	The projects would temporarily convert land designated as Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural uses, but mitigation is provided to prevent a permanent conversion.
Objective 1.1. Maintain existing agricultural land uses outside of urbanizing areas and allow only those land uses in agricultural areas that are compatible with agricultural activities.	Consistent	The projects uses are compatible with existing surrounding agricultural uses.
Objective 1.2. Encourage the continuation of irrigation agriculture on Important farmland.	Consistent	The projects would temporarily convert Important Farmland on-site to non-agricultural uses, but the projects' indirect impact reduces the need for Imperial Irrigation District (IID) to fallow irrigated lands elsewhere in the County to meet IID water conservation goals.
Objective 1.3. Conserve Important Farmland for continued farm related (non-urban) use and development while ensuring its proper management and use.	Inconsistent	The projects would result in the temporary conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural uses. This would be considered an adverse impact requiring mitigation.
Objective 1.4. Discourage the location of development adjacent to productive agricultural lands.	Consistent	The projects would develop a solar facility adjacent to productive agricultural lands. However, this development would not include a residential component. In addition, the projects are an allowable use within applicable agricultural zones (subject to the issuance of a Conditional Use Permit), and the existing zoning of the study area is consistent with the existing General Plan land use designation.
Objective 1.5. Direct development to less valuable farmland (i.e., Unique Farmland and Farmland of Local Importance rather than Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance) when conversion of agricultural land is justified.	Consistent	The projects would temporarily convert land designated as Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural uses. However, with the issuance of a Conditional Use Permit, the proposed use would be consistent with Imperial County's Land Use Ordinance and thus is also consistent with the land use designation of the site. In addition, mitigation is required to prevent permanent conversion of valuable farmland.
Objective 1.6. Recognize and preserve unincorporated areas of the County, outside the city sphere of influence areas, for irrigation agriculture, livestock production, aquaculture, and other special uses.	Consistent	The projects would temporarily convert land located in an unincorporated area to non-agricultural uses. However, with issuance of a Conditional Use Permit, the projects would be considered an allowable use in an agricultural zone as a special use.
Objective 1.8. Allow conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses only where a clear and immediate need can be demonstrated, based on population projections and lack of other available land (including land within incorporated cities) for such non-agricultural uses. Such conversion shall	Consistent	The study area is designated as an agriculture land use. With approval of a Conditional Use Permit, the projects would be consistent with the County's Land Use Ordinance. Therefore, because the projects would be consistent with the Land Use Ordinance, it would also be

General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
also be allowed only where such uses have been identified for non-agricultural use in a City General Plan or the County General Plan, and are supported by a study to show lack of alternative sites.		consistent with the General Plan land use designation.
Goal 2. Adopt policies that prohibit “leapfrogging” or “checkerboard” patterns of nonagricultural development in agricultural areas and confine future urbanization to adopted Sphere of Influence area.	Consistent	The study area is designated for agriculture land use in the County General Plan. Agriculture lands generally surround the study area. The projects would not contain a residential component that would induce urbanization adjacent to the projects. Furthermore, with the issuance of a Conditional Use Permit the projects are consistent with the County’s Land Use Ordinance. Consistency with the Land Use Ordinance implies consistency with the General Plan land use designation.
Objective 2.1. Do not allow the placement of new non-agricultural land uses such that agricultural fields or parcels become isolated or more difficult to economically and conveniently farm.	Consistent	Neither construction nor operation of the solar facility would not make it difficult to economically or conveniently farm. After project implementation the adjacent agricultural fields would remain contiguous to one another with the exception of an area to the south of CSF1(A) and adjacent to the U.S./Mexico border. Although this area would appear “isolated,” this agricultural area would remain viable given that the projects are generally a compatible land use and existing access to this agricultural area would not be modified or obstructed.
Objective 2.2. Encourage the infilling of development in urban areas as an alternative to expanding urban boundaries.	Consistent	The projects consist of the construction and operation of a solar facility. The projects are an industrial use and would not induce growth in the area nor result in the expansion of urban boundaries.
Objective 2.3. Maintain agricultural lands in parcel size configurations that help assure that viable farming units are retained.	Consistent	The projects would temporarily convert agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. However, the projects would not be subdivided into smaller parcels. The size of the existing parcels would be retained for future agricultural use following site restoration.
Objective 2.4. Discourage the parcelization of large holdings.	Consistent	See response to Objective 2.3 above.
Objective 2.6. Discourage the development of new residential or other non-agricultural areas outside of city “sphere of influence” unless designated for non-agricultural use in the County General Plan, or for necessary public facilities.	Consistent	With approval of a Conditional Use Permit, the projects are an allowable use within the agricultural zones of the property. The allowable uses within the agricultural zones are consistent with the agriculture land use designation of the General Plan.



General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
Goal 3. Limit the introduction of conflicting uses into farming areas, including residential development of existing parcels which may create the potential for conflict with continued agricultural use of adjacent property.	Consistent	With approval of a Conditional Use Permit, the projects are an allowable use in agricultural zones. Additionally, the projects do not propose the development of housing.
Objective 3.2. Enforce the provisions of the Imperial County Right-to-Farm Ordinance (No. 1031).	Consistent	The Imperial County Right-to-Farm Ordinance would be enforced.
Objective 3.3. Enforce the provisions of the State nuisance law (California Code Sub-Section 3482).	Consistent	The provisions of the State nuisance law would be incorporated into the projects.
Objective 3.5. As a general rule, utilize transitional land uses around urban areas as buffers from agricultural uses. Such buffers may include rural residential uses, industrial uses, recreational areas, roads, canals, and open space areas.	Consistent	The projects are characterized as solar facilities that are permissible conditional uses on agricultural land and would be located adjacent to agricultural land.
Objective 3.6. Where a development permit is sought adjacent to agricultural land use, protect agricultural operations by requiring appropriate buffer zones between the agricultural land and new developments, and then keep these zones aesthetically pleasing and free of pests by cleaning them of all garbage and noxious vegetation. Vegetation for the purpose of dust control shall be planted and maintained in an attractive manner. The buffer shall occur on the parcel for which the development permit is sought and shall favor protection of the maximum amount of farmland.	Consistent	The projects would implement a noxious weed control plan to be implemented during the construction phases and operation of the projects. The burden of maintaining public roads falls upon the County of Imperial.

Source: County of Imperial General Plan, as amended through 2008.

### Farmland Quality

To assess the quality of the study area for agricultural cultivation, the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) model<sup>1</sup> developed by the DOC was utilized. LESA assessments have been prepared for the Mount Signal Solar Farm 1 (MSSF1), Calexico Solar Farm 1 (CSF1) and Calexico Solar Farm 2 (CSF2(A) and (B)) sites. The LESA Model is an approach used to rate the relative quality of land resources based upon six specific measureable features. Two Land Evaluation factors are based upon measures of soil resource quality. Four Site Assessment factors provide measures of a given project’s size, water resource availability, surrounding agricultural lands, and surrounding protected resource lands. Based on the results for the LESA analysis, each of the five project sites comprising the study area are all classified as Important Farmland. The results of the LESA for each of the five project sites comprising the study area is provided in Appendix C.

Results obtained from the LESA model closely correlate with Important Farmland Maps produced by the DOC’s FMMP. The 2008 important farmland maps for Imperial County indicate that a majority of the study

<sup>1</sup> LESA is a point-based approach for rating the relative importance of agricultural land resources based upon specific measurable features. LESA evaluates measures of soil resource quality, a given project’s size, water resource availability, surrounding agricultural lands, and surrounding protected resource lands. For a given project, the factors are rated, weighted, and combined, resulting in a single numeric score. The project score becomes the basis for making a determination of a project’s potential significance.

area is comprised of Farmland of Statewide Importance with small isolated areas designated as Prime Farmland and "Other." These farmland designations are illustrated in Figure 4.2-1.

Prime Farmland, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is farmland characterized by the best combination of physical and chemical features enabling it to sustain long-term agricultural production. Table 4.2-3 provides an acreage breakdown for the study area. Approximately 409 acres of Prime Farmland are classified within the study area. Farmland of Statewide importance includes lands that are nearly prime farmland and may produce as high a yield as prime farmland when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some lands in this category may include those that are set aside by state law for agricultural purposes (DOC 2000). Approximately 3,790 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance are classified within the study area. "Other Land" is defined as land not included in any other mapping category with common examples including low density rural developments; brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing; confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities; strip mines, borrow pits; and, water bodies smaller than 40 acres. Approximately 30 acres of "Other Land" are classified within the study area.

**TABLE 4.2-3. FMMP DESIGNATIONS WITHIN THE STUDY AREA FOR THE PROJECTS**

Land Use Category	Study Area	MSSF1	CSF1(A)	CSF1(B)	CSF2(A)	CSF2(B)
Prime Farmland	409.3	88.7	130	184	--	6.5
Farmland of Statewide Importance	3,790.1	1,339.4	588.7	406	937.8	518.2
Other Land	29.8	3.8	0.9	22.7	2.3	0.1

Source: DOC 2008.

Note: OFT on private lands would overlap with the farmland areas identified for MSSF1, CSF1(A), and CSF1(B) and, therefore, are not provided separately. Additionally, there remains uncertainty regarding the exact location in terms of the placement of transmission towers.

### Soil Resources

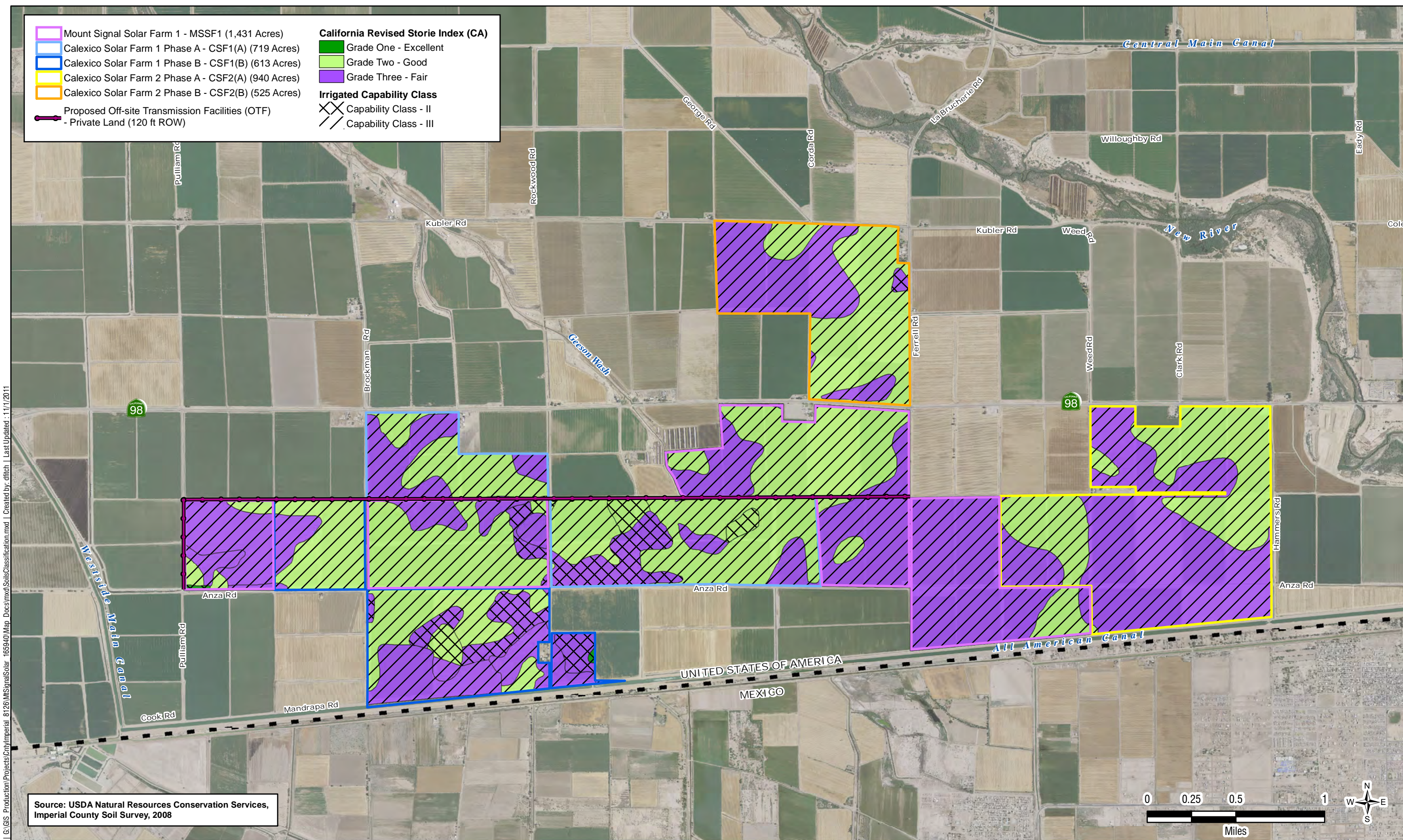
The suitability of the local soil resource plays a crucial part in the determination of a plot's farmland designation. The land capability classification (LCC) system developed by the USDA, NRCS, rates each of the soil types within the County in relation to its limitations for crop management. A soil rated as Class I is considered to have few limitations whereas a soil rated as Class VIII could have severe limitations that, in many circumstances, would preclude it from commercial crop production. Figure 4.2-2 provides the LCC for soil resources within the study area assuming a readily available supply of irrigation water. As depicted in Figure 4.2-2, the study area is primarily comprised of soil types with LCC ratings of II and III, with soil wetness during winter months being the primary limitation to crop production.

Soils are also rated by the Storie Index, a numerical system expressing the relative degree of suitability, or value of a soil for general intensive agriculture use. The index considers a soil's color and texture, the depth of nutrients, presence of stones, and slope, all of which relate to the adequacy of a soil type for use in crop cultivation. The rating does not take into account other factors, such as the availability of water for irrigation, the climate, and the distance from markets. Values of the index range from 1 to 100 and are divided into six grades, with an index of 100 and a grade of 1 being the most suitable farmland. Figure 4.2-2 illustrates the Storie Index classifications for soil resources within the study area. As shown, the Storie Index for soil resources within the study area are generally classified as Grade 2 (Good) and 3 (Fair) with isolated areas classified as Grade 1 (Excellent).

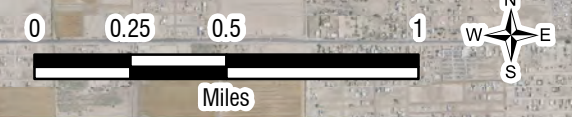


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	Mount Signal Solar Farm 1 - MSSF1 (1,431 Acres)	<b>California Revised Storie Index (CA)</b>	
	Calexico Solar Farm 1 Phase A - CSF1(A) (719 Acres)		Grade One - Excellent
	Calexico Solar Farm 1 Phase B - CSF1(B) (613 Acres)		Grade Two - Good
	Calexico Solar Farm 2 Phase A - CSF2(A) (940 Acres)		Grade Three - Fair
	Calexico Solar Farm 2 Phase B - CSF2(B) (525 Acres)	<b>Irrigated Capability Class</b>	
	Proposed Off-site Transmission Facilities (OTF)		Capability Class - II
	Private Land (120 ft ROW)		Capability Class - III



Source: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services, Imperial County Soil Survey, 2008







## 4.2.2 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section presents the significance criteria used for considering project-related land used compatibility impacts and consistency with applicable planning documents, the methodology employed for the evaluation, and mitigation requirements, if necessary.

### 4.2.2.1 Thresholds of Significance

The thresholds for significance of impacts for the analysis are based on the environmental checklist in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines. Consistent with the CEQA Guidelines and the professional judgment of the County's staff and environmental consultants, the projects would result in a significant impact on the environment if it would:

- Convert economically viable 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;
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract in an area in which continued agriculture is economically viable;
- Involve other changes in the existing environment that, due to their location or nature, could individually or cumulatively result in loss of economically viable Farmland, to non-agricultural uses; or
- Impair agricultural productivity of the project site or use of neighboring areas.

### 4.2.2.2 Methodology

This analysis evaluates the potential for the projects, as described in Chapter 3, Project Description, to adversely impact agricultural resources within the study area based on the applied significance criteria as identified above. This analysis utilizes the State's LESA Model in conjunction with other readily available information sources in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. As indicated in the environmental setting, three separate LESA Models have been prepared for the projects which cover the MSSF1, CSF1(A) and (B), and CSF2(A) and (B) site locations. These reports are included as Appendix C of this Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The analysis prepared for this EIR also relied on NRCS soil survey data, Important Farmland maps for Imperial County prepared by the State, and Williamson Act contract maps prepared by Imperial County. A combination of these sources was used to determine the agricultural significance of the lands in the study area, including the Off-site Transmission Facilities.

Additionally, potential conflicts with existing agricultural zoning, incompatibility with existing Williamson Act contracts, or other changes resulting from the implementation of the projects, which could indirectly remove Important Farmland from agricultural production or reduce agricultural productivity were considered. Sources used in this evaluation included, but were not limited to, the Imperial County General Plan, as amended through 2008, and zoning ordinance. Additional background information on land uses was obtained through field review and consultation with appropriate agencies. Conceptual site plans for the projects were also used to evaluate potential impacts. These conceptual exhibits are provided in Figures 3.0-4 through 3.0-6 and 3.0-9 through 3.0-13.

### 4.2.2.3 Impact Analysis

IMPACT 4.2-1	Conversion of Important Farmlands to Non-Agricultural Use. Implementation of the projects would result in the conversion of economically viable Important Farmland, including prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance, to non-agricultural uses.
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Implementation of the projects as a whole would result in the temporary conversion of approximately 4,229 acres of land currently under or available for agricultural production to non-agricultural uses. Approximately 409 acres of the study area are classified as Prime Farmland with 3,790 acres identified as Farmland of Local Importance (see Table 4.2-3). The remaining 31 acres is identified as Other Land (see Table 4.2-3). The loss of agricultural land designated Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance is typically considered a significant impact under CEQA.

To verify these farmland designations, the State's LESA model was used with the results provided in Appendix C. Based on the LESA's scoring methodology, a site scoring of 60 points or higher is typically considered "significant." The LESA scoring for the site locations analyzed in conjunction with the projects are provided in Table 4.2-4. As shown, the LESA scores for the study area support the farmland designations as identified in the FMMP. Hence, their conversion to non-agricultural use, albeit temporary, would be considered **significant**.

**TABLE 4.2-4. LESA SCORING FOR THE STUDY AREA**

Site Component	LESA Score	LE Factors <sup>1</sup>	SA Factors <sup>2</sup>	Significant?
MSSF1	73.59	28.59	45.0	Yes
CSF1(A) and (B)	75.63	30.63	45.0	Yes
CSF2(A) and (B)	74.0	29.0	45.0	Yes

Source: Environmental Management Associates 2011.

Notes: 1. Land evaluation (LE) includes soil LCC and Storie Index.

2. Site assessment (SA) factors include water availability, project size, and Surrounding Agricultural Land & Surrounding Protected Resource Land.

As provided in Section 4.2.1.1 and Chapter 3, the project applicant would be required to restore the study area following project operations, therefore agricultural uses would be possible in the future. Given that the project facilities would be constructed near the existing grade, restoration of the study area to facilitate future cultivated agriculture would generally be feasible. However, with the projects, there would be a 40-year period where existing agricultural uses within the study area would no longer be possible until the site is restored. Additionally, although the project applicant is proposing agriculture as the proposed end use, it is possible that project-related activities (e.g., soil disturbance) and subsequent restoration of the site could result in a net reduction in prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance within the study area. These acreage reductions could occur through alterations in soil productivity or the retention of project-related structures. Without additional guidance and performance criteria to ensure that no net reduction in important farmland occurs, a short-term and potentially long-term net reduction in either of these two farmland classifications within the study area would be considered **significant**.

### MSSF1

The impacts described for the projects would be similar to impacts that could occur for the MSSF1 site component; however, these impacts would occur at both a reduced severity and intensity. Development of the MSSF1 site would be limited to 1,431.9 acres. The build-out of the MSSF1 site location would include the conversion of approximately 89 acres of Prime Farmland, 1,339.4 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 3.8 acres of other land. Similar to the discussion for the projects, the conversion of these lands, albeit temporary, is considered significant. Given that construction-related



activities (e.g., soil disturbance) and subsequent restoration of the MSSF1 site would result in a short-term and potentially long-term net reduction in prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance acreages, this impact is considered **significant**.

### CSF1(A)

The impacts described for the projects as a whole would be similar to impacts that could occur for the CSF1(A) site component; however, these impacts would occur at both a reduced severity and intensity. Development of the CSF1(A) site would be limited to 719 acres. The build-out of the CSF1(A) site location would include the conversion of approximately 130 acres of Prime Farmland, 588.7 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 0.9 acres of other land. Similar to the discussion for the projects, the conversion of these lands, albeit temporary, is considered significant. Given that construction-related activities (e.g., soil disturbance) and subsequent restoration of the CSF1(A) site would result in a short-term and potentially long-term net reduction in prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance acreages, this impact is considered **significant**.

### CSF1(B)

The impacts described for the projects as a whole would be similar to impacts that could occur for the CSF1(B) site component; however, these impacts would occur at both a reduced severity and intensity. Development of the CSF1(B) site would be limited to 613 acres. The build-out of the CSF1(B) site location would include the conversion of approximately 184 acres of Prime Farmland, 406 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and 22.7 acres of other land. Similar to the discussion for the projects, the conversion of these lands, albeit temporary, is considered significant. Given that construction-related activities (e.g. soil disturbance) and subsequent restoration of the CSF1(B) site would result in a short-term and potentially long-term net reduction in prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance acreages, this impact is considered **significant**.

### CSF2(A)

The impacts described for the projects as a whole would be similar to impacts that could occur for the CSF2(A) site component; however, these impacts would occur at both a reduced severity and intensity. Development of the CSF2(A) site would be limited to 940 acres. Additionally, no Prime Farmland is designated within CSF2(A). Nevertheless, the build-out of the CSF2(A) site location would include the conversion of approximately 938.8 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance and 2.3 acres of other land. Similar to the discussion for the projects, the conversion of these lands, albeit temporary, is considered significant. Given that construction-related activities (e.g. soil disturbance) and subsequent restoration of the CSF2(A) site would result in a short-term and potentially long-term net reduction in farmland of statewide importance acreages, this impact is considered **significant**.

### CSF2(B)

The impacts described for the projects as a whole would be similar to impacts that could occur for the CSF2(B) site component; however, these impacts would occur at both a reduced severity and intensity. Development of the CSF2(B) site would be limited to 940 acres. The build-out of the CSF2(B) site location would include the conversion of approximately 6.5 acres of Prime Farmland, 518.2 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, and <1 acre of other land. Similar to the discussion for the projects, the conversion of these lands, albeit temporary, is considered significant. Given that construction-related activities (e.g., soil disturbance) and subsequent restoration of the CSF2(B) site could still result in a short-term and potentially long-term net reduction in Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance acreages, this impact is considered **significant**.

## OTF-Private

As provided in Chapter 3, Project Description, the project applicant would locate the transmission towers within the area of the OTF on private lands along the fringe (or edge) of agricultural fields to minimize disruptions to important farmlands and facilitate future agricultural use following restoration of the project sites. Given that the OTF would overlap with MSSF1, CSF1(A), and CSF1(B), no additional acreages of important farmland would be impacted beyond those acreages described under the corresponding site headings. Once in operation, limited agricultural activities would be feasible within the new right-of-way (ROW) to the extent practical and where solar arrays are not constructed. Based on these considerations, this project facility would not result in the conversion of important farmland to non-agricultural use and the impact would be **less than significant**.

## OTF-BLM Lands

No Important Farmlands are located within the new 230 kV transmission facility for BLM Utility Corridor "N." In fact, the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan prohibits agricultural uses in this area (refer to Imperial Solar Energy Center South Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) Section 3.9, page 3.9-2). Based on these considerations, this project facility would not result in the conversion of important farmland to non-agricultural use and **no impact** would occur.

### Mitigation Measure(s)

The following mitigation measures are required for MSSF1, CSF1(A), CSF1(B), and CSF2(B). No mitigation is required for OTF-Private and OTF-BLM Lands.

**4.2-1a Minimize Impacts to Important Farmlands (Prime Farmland).** The applicant shall mitigate for short- and long-term impacts to Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance through the implementation of one of the three optional mitigation requirements as prescribed in the County's MOU regarding solar generation projects on agricultural lands.

**Option 1:** The applicant shall provide agricultural conservation easements on a "2 to 1" basis on land of equal size, of equal farmland quality, and outside the path of development. The conservation easement shall meet DOC standards and shall be recorded prior to issuance of any grading or building permits.

**Option 2:** The applicant shall pay an "Agricultural In-Lieu Mitigation Fee" in the amount of 20% of the fair market value per acre for the total based on five comparable sales of land used for agricultural purposes as of the effective date of the permit, including program costs on a cost recovery/time and material basis. The Agricultural In-Lieu Mitigation Fee will be placed in a trust account administered by the Imperial County Agricultural Commissioner's office and will be used for such purposes as the acquisition, stewardship, preservation and enhancement of agricultural lands within Imperial County.

**Option 3:** The applicant shall revise applicable conditional use permit (CUP) applications and associated site plans to avoid Prime Farmland.

**4.2-1b Prepare an Important Farmland Restoration Plan (Prime Farmland).** The applicant shall submit to Imperial County a site-specific restoration plan capable of restoring on-site soils back to current agricultural conditions prior to the issuance of grading or building permits. The restoration plan shall include a site restoration cost estimate prepared by a California-licensed general contractor or civil engineer. The applicant shall provide financial assurances/bonding in the amount equal to the site restoration cost estimate to

return the land back to its agricultural conditions after the solar facility ceases operations and closes.

The following mitigation measure is required for CSF2(A).

**4.2-1c Minimize Impacts to Important Farmlands (Non-Prime Farmland).** The applicant shall mitigate for short- and long-term impacts to Farmland of Statewide Importance through the implementation of one of the three optional mitigation requirements as prescribed in the County’s MOU regarding solar generation projects on agricultural lands.

**Option 1:** The applicant shall provide agricultural conservation easements on a “1 to 1” basis on land of equal size, of equal farmland quality, and outside the path of development. The conservation easement shall meet Department of Conservation standards and shall be recorded prior to issuance of any grading or building permits.

**Option 2:** The applicant shall pay an “Agricultural In-Lieu Mitigation Fee” in the amount of 20% of the fair market value per acre for the total acres of the proposed site based on five comparable sales of land used for agricultural purposes as of the effective date of the permit, including program costs on a cost recovery/time and material basis. The Agricultural In-Lieu Mitigation Fee will be placed in a trust account administered by the Imperial County Agricultural Commissioner’s office and will be used for such purposes as the acquisition, stewardship, preservation and enhancement of agricultural lands within Imperial County.

**Option 3:** The applicant shall submit to Imperial County a site-specific restoration plan capable of restoring on-site soils back to current agricultural conditions prior to the issuance of grading or building permits. The restoration plan shall include a site restoration cost estimate prepared by a California-licensed general contractor or civil engineer. The applicant shall provide financial assurances/bonding in the amount equal to the site restoration cost estimate to return the land back to its agricultural conditions after the solar facility ceases operations and closes.

**Significance After Mitigation**

With the implementation of Mitigation Measures 4.2-1a and 4.2-1b, the project applicant would be required to minimize the permanent loss of valuable farmlands through a combination of mandatory on-site restoration and either avoidance of Prime Farmland, provision of an agricultural conservation easement, or payment into the County agricultural fee program. These measures would reduce the impact to the PP, MSSF1, CSF1(A), CSF1(B), and CSF2(B) to important farmlands, including prime farmland, to a less than significant level. The implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-1c would minimize impacts to Important Farmlands within CSF2(A) to a **less than significant** level.

IMPACT 4.2-2	Result in the Non-Renewal or Cancellation of an Active Williamson Act Contract. The projects could conflict with the existing agricultural zoning for the study area or with the provisions of an existing Williamson Act contract.
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**CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), CSF2(B), OTF-Private**

**Williamson Act.** As previously indicated in Section 4.2.1.1, the study area contains four active Williamson Act Contracts. These active contracts occur within CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), and CSF2(B); however, petitions for cancellation have been filed for each of these active contract by the associated landowners. Additionally, there are properties surrounding the study area under active

Williamson Act Contracts (see Figure 4.2-1). As such, any activities associated with the projects that could create disincentives for adjacent properties to keep renewing their existing contracts would be considered significant. However, given that final land uses following the projects would consist of agricultural uses, no new growth pressures are anticipated as a direct consequence of the projects. For this reason, the indirect impact of the projects on adjacent contracted lands is considered **less than significant**.

Additionally, it is important to note that the Imperial County Board of Supervisors recently voted to not renew existing Williamson Act Contracts within the County due to the State's decision to discontinue funding for the program. This essentially means that all active contracts within the County will go to non-renewal status in January 2012. Although there remains a possibility that the State will reinstate funding for Williamson Act subventions, the fact the Board of Supervisors has already voted to discontinue funding for the program brings into question the continuation of the Williamson Act program within Imperial County. Although, landowners do have the option to protest the non-renewal, this option only allows them to keep their Williamson Act value until there is less than six years remaining in the non-renewal phase-out. Beyond four years, current tax incentives would no longer apply. Based on these circumstances, each of the active Williamson Act contracts could theoretically be in non-renewal status prior to project approval.

Nevertheless, the projects would require the cancellation of up to 4 active Williamson Act Contracts and, based on the applied significance criteria, this would be considered a significant impact. Further, it is important to understand that the cancellation process must be initiated by the properly owner. Given that the properties currently under the provision of the Williamson Act would be leased by the applicant and, therefore, the burden of cancellation or non-renewal would be placed on the landowner. Additionally, per Government Code Section 51282(a), the County Board of Supervisors is required to make certain findings prior to tentative approval for the cancellation of a contract. Based on these considerations and the fact that petitions for cancellation have already been filed with the County, the projects' potential conflicts within the provisions of the Williamson Act are considered **significant**.

**Agricultural Zoning.** Pursuant to the County General Plan, the study area containing the projects is located on land designated for agricultural uses. The solar energy facility components of the projects would be constructed on lands currently zoned A-2 (General Agriculture), A-2-R (General Agricultural Rural Zone), or A-3 (Heavy Agriculture). Solar energy plants are identified as a conditionally allowed use within these zones, subject to the issuance of a CUP. With the issuance of a CUP, the projects' use would be consistent with the Imperial County land use ordinance and thus is also consistent with the land use designation of the site. Additionally, the operation of the solar generating facilities is not expected to inhibit or adversely affect adjacent agricultural operations through the placement of sensitive lands uses, generation of excessive dust or shading, or place additional development pressures on adjacent areas. Based on these considerations, the impact is considered **less than significant**.

### MSSF1 and OTF-BLM Lands

The MSSF1 site location and OTF on BLM Lands do not contain active Williamson Act Contracts. Based on this circumstance, development of the MSSF1 site would have **no impact** on an active Williamson Act Contract. The discussion of agricultural zoning for the projects would also be applicable to the MSSF1 site location. Based on these circumstances, impacts would be **less than significant**.

#### Mitigation Measure(s)

The following mitigation measure is required for CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), and CSF2(B). No mitigation is required for MSSF1 and OTF on private and BLM lands.

**4.2-2a. Minimize Economic Impacts to Imperial Valley Agriculture.** If cancellation of one or more Williamson Act Contracts is required, the applicant shall minimize the revenues lost

to the County as a result of the change to non-agricultural use through the implementation of one of the following options:

**Option 1:** Compensate for lost agricultural revenues through the implementation of the following:

- If the applicant receives an exclusion from applicable sales and use tax payable to the County of Imperial under Senate Bill 71, State Public Resources Code (Section 26003) and the California Alternative Energy and Advanced Transportation Financing Authority CAETFAs, the applicant shall pay to the County and Local Transportation authority an amount equal to the sales tax (currently at 1.5%) which would have been received if the applicant had not obtained such an exclusion.
- The applicant shall return the one-cent local sales and use tax to the County of Imperial to the extent permissible by law. To accomplish this, the applicant shall either cause its construction contractor to treat the project in accordance with California Regulations 1521(C)(13)(B) and 1826(b) for sales and use tax purposes or form a “Buying company” as defined in the Californian Board of Equalization Regulation 1699(h). Alternatively, the applicant can adopt an alternate methodology to accomplish this goal if such methodology is approved by the County Executive Officer prior to the issues of grading or building permits.
- The applicant shall include the switchyard, electrical interconnection facility, and associated components as “solar components” subject to assessment and taxation under California Revenue and Taxation code Section 73 (AB 1451).

**Option 2:** The applicant shall revise the site plan for PP, CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), and CSF2(B) to remove all Williamson Act contracted lands.

**4.2.2b. Prepare an Important Farmland Restoration Plan (Williamson Act Lands).** Implement Mitigation Measure 4.2-1b for all lands included within CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), and CSF2(B) and under the provisions of an existing Williamson Act contract.

**Significance After Mitigation**

With the implementation of Mitigation Measures 4.2-2a and 4.2-2b, the project applicant would be required to supplement tax revenues lost by the conversion of Williamson Act contracted lands to non-agricultural uses or avoid Williamson Act parcels included within the study area.

<p><b>IMPACT</b> 4.2-3</p>	<p><b>Result in Other Effects that could Contribute to the Conversion of Active Farmlands to Non-Agricultural Use.</b> The projects could result in direct and indirect impacts to adjacent agricultural lands that could indirectly contribute to conversion of active farmland to non-agricultural use.</p>
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**MSSF1, CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), CSF2(B)**

The Agricultural Element of the County’s General Plan serves as the primary policy statement for implementing development policies for agricultural land use in Imperial County. The goals, objectives, implementation programs, and policies found in the Agricultural Element provide direction for private development as well as government actions and programs. A summary of the relevant Agricultural goals and objectives and the projects’ consistency with applicable goals and objectives is summarized in Table 4.2-2. As provided, the projects are generally consistent with certain Agricultural Element Goals and Objectives of the County General Plan, but mitigation is required for the projects.

Per County policy, agricultural land may be converted to non-agricultural uses only where a clear and immediate need can be demonstrated, such as requirements for urban housing, commercial facilities, or employment opportunities. Further, no agricultural land designated except as provided in Exhibit C shall be removed from the agriculture category except where needed for use by a public agency, for geothermal purposes, where a mapping error may have occurred, or where a clear long-term economic benefit to the County can be demonstrated through the planning and environmental review process. As provided in Impact 4.2-1, although the projects would convert lands currently under agricultural production, the project applicant is proposing agriculture as the end use and will be required to prepare a site-specific Restoration Plan to minimize impacts related to short- and long-term conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use. Additionally, the County is requiring Mitigation Measures 4.2-1a and 4.2-1b to ensure that post-restoration of the project-facilitates result in no net reduction in prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance. These measures in conjunction with project design features would be required to ensure the projects' consistency with applicable County General Plan goals and objectives. This impact would be **significant** without mitigation.

The nature of the projects warrants that the study area be located adjacent to existing electrical transmission infrastructure, which is currently approved immediately west or undergoing parallel environmental review. The study area is located on the periphery of active agricultural lands within the County and development of the projects would not contribute to a "leapfrogging" pattern of development. Also, the use of the agricultural land is not considered permanent given that the applicant will be conditioned to restore the site back to agricultural use. In this context, the projects would be consistent with applicable General Plan policies and is considered **less than significant**.

The projects would not directly impact the movement of agricultural equipment on roads located within the agriculture category and access to existing agriculture-serving roads would not be precluded or hindered by the projects. No modifications to roadways are proposed in the study area that would otherwise affect other agricultural operations in the area. Furthermore, existing nuisance issues such as noise, dust, and odors from existing agricultural use would not impact the projects given the general lack of associated sensitive uses (e.g. residences). Likewise, with mitigation measures proposed in other resource sections (e.g. air quality, noise, etc.) project-related activities would not adversely affect adjacent agricultural operations. Additionally, the projects would not develop infrastructure that would attract or encourage new development of adjacent farmlands. Further, the provisions of the Imperial County Right-to-Farm Ordinance (No. 1031) and the State nuisance law (California Code Sub-Section 3482) would continue to be enforced. Based on these considerations, the projects are not expected to adversely impact adjacent landowners' abilities to economically and conveniently farm adjacent agricultural land and the impact is considered **less than significant**.

### **OTF-Private, OTF-BLM Lands**

The portion of the OTF located within BLM lands is located in a desert area, and agriculture is not an allowed use. Likewise, the installation of the OTF on private lands is not expected to preclude agricultural activities within the right-of-way. Based on these considerations, the result impact is considered **less than significant**.

#### **Mitigation Measure(s)**

The following mitigation measures are required for MSSF1. No mitigation would be required for the OTF-Private and OTF-BLM Lands.

- Implement Mitigation Measures 4.2-1a and 4.2-1b.

The following mitigation measures are required for CSF1(A), CSF1(B), and CSF2(B).

- Implement Mitigation Measures 4.2-1a, 4.2-1b, and 4.2-2a.



The following mitigation measures are required for CSF2(A).

- Implement Mitigation Measures 4.2-1c and 4.2-2b.

**Significance After Mitigation**

With the implementation of the above mitigation measures, the project applicant would be required to restoration of all important farmlands impacts by the projects and required to supplement tax revenues lost by the conversion of Williamson Act contracted lands to non-agricultural uses or avoid Williamson Act parcels included within the study area. Compliance with these measures would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

<b>IMPACT</b> 4.2-4	<b>Adversely Affect Agricultural Productivity.</b> The projects could impair the agricultural productivity of the study area or use of neighboring areas for agricultural use.
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**MSSF1, CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), CSF2(B)**

Agricultural productivity of the study area could be reduced as a result of the projects, even after final restoration of individual site components. The combination of planting on reintroduced, stockpiled topsoil or directly on subsoil materials could affect future cultivation of the individual site components and their associated rating under the FMMP. The portion of the OTF located within BLM land would not impact agricultural resources.

As indicated in Chapter 3, the applicant is required to prepare a Site Restoration Plan. In any land restoration project, it is necessary to minimize disruption to topsoil or stockpiled topsoil for later use during restoration following project decommissioning. As previously noted in the setting discussion, soil resources within the study area have a LCC rating ranging from II to III. Based on these classifications, one may conclude that on-site soil resources rank relatively high in terms of their suitability for agricultural cultivation (e.g., effective rooting depth, soil texture, nutrient holding capacity, etc.). With the implementation of the projects, it is possible that the physical and chemical makeup of the soil materials within the upper soil horizon may change during construction and associated stockpiling operations. Improper soil stockpiling and management of the stockpiles could result in increased decomposition of soil organic materials, increased leaching of plant-available nitrogen, and depletion of soil biota communities (e.g., Rhizobium or Frankia). Each of these circumstances could have an adverse effect on the future productivity of the restored soils. Any reductions in agricultural productivity could significantly limit the types of crops (e.g., deeper rooting crops, orchards, etc.) that may be grown within the study area in the future. This is considered a **significant** impact attributable to the projects.

**OTF-Private, OTF-BLM Lands**

The OTF on private and BLM Lands would result in minimal to no impact on the agricultural productivity, since agricultural operations are not permitted on BLM Lands and could be facilitated within the OTF right-of-way on private lands. Based on these considerations, the resulting impact is considered **less than significant**.

**Mitigation Measure(s)**

The following mitigation measure is required for MSSF1, CSF1(A), CSF1(B), CSF2(A), and CSF2(B). No mitigation would be required for the OTF-Private or OTF-BLM Lands.

**4.2-4 Prepare Comprehensive Soil Resource Extraction, Maintenance and Reintroduction Plan.** The Restoration Plan for the projects shall be modified to incorporate elements of a comprehensive soil resource extraction, maintenance and reintroduction plan. The ultimate goal of the plan will be to ensure the future productivity

of the soil resource and its availability for future agricultural cultivation in compliance with the performance standards for prime agricultural land restoration, Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 3707 and 3711. At a minimum, the plan shall consist of the following elements:

- a. **Existing Conditions.** This element of the plan shall identify the existing soil fertility in terms of pertinent soil physical, chemical, and biological attributes. It will identify the soil attributes that are most able to be maintained during the 40-year life of the project and will be used as the baseline, with which to compare the soil resource following restoration and better enable rehabilitation of the mining site.
- b. **Soil Harvesting and Transport.** This element will identify appropriate soil harvesting and transport methods to limit the compaction of the soil resource, maintain the existing soil profile, and to the extent feasible during transport, ensure the viability of existing soil biota.
- c. **Soil Stockpile Maintenance and Monitoring.** This element of the plan will outline performance standards and monitoring procedures for the soil stockpiles over the 40-year life of the project. In general, this element will identify suitable vegetative species (e.g., legumes) to be planted on the soil stockpiles, monitoring protocols for any periodic analytical analysis determined necessary, and procedures for conducting periodic soil microbiology cultures. This element will also identify watering requirements for the stockpiles and protocols for pest and invasive species control.
- d. **Restoration Activities.** Following the completion of mining activities, site restoration shall consist of preparing the site for agriculture. Soil tests and climatic studies of the reclaimed sites shall be systematically performed to ensure that soil compactability is suitable for a production level present prior to project implementation. An evaluation of deep ripping prior to the reintroduction of topsoil should be conducted to determine if such procedures would help to alleviate anticipated drainage limitations. In addition, the applicant shall minimize application of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers due to the proximity of (shallow) groundwater. A complete agronomic evaluation shall be conducted prior to plantings to establish rates of fertilizer and herbicide applications.

### Significance After Mitigation

With the implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.2-4, the project applicant would be required to prepare a comprehensive soil resource extraction, maintenance and reintroduction plan that would maximize the potential for restoration of the study area to agricultural use following completion of the projects. Compliance with these measures would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

### 4.2.3 Residual Impacts

With mitigation, issues related to the conversion of Important Farmland to non-agricultural use would be mitigated and reduced to a less than significant level. Operation of the projects, subject to the provision of a CUP, would generally be consistent with applicable Federal, State, regional, and local plans and policies. Although the projects would require the non-renewal or cancellation of one or more active Williamson Act contracts, the mitigation prescribed in this section would minimize the economic implications associated with the cancellation of such contracts. Further, given that the County Board has voted to discontinue participation in the Williamson Act program, the mitigation prescribed in this section would be sufficient to minimize conflicts with the intent of the Williamson Act to a less than significant level. Following the proposed use (e.g., solar facilities), the project sites would be decommissioned and restored to facilitate agricultural cultivation. Based on these circumstances, the projects would not result in any residual significant and unmitigable impacts to agricultural resources.