3.2 AGRICULTURE

This section describes the impacts on agriculture resources that would result from implementation of the proposed project. Included is a review of existing conditions, a summary of applicable policies and regulations related to agriculture, and analysis of environmental impacts of the proposed project. Where feasible, mitigation measures are included for significant impacts.

3.2.1 Existing Conditions

3.2.1.1 Regulatory Setting

State

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Government Code Section 51200, et seq.), also known as the Williamson Act, protects farmland from conversion to other uses by offering owners of agricultural land a property tax incentive to maintain their land in agricultural use. Under the Williamson Act, the landowner contracts with the county or city in which their property is located, promising to maintain the land as agriculture or a compatible use for a minimum period of 10 years. In return, the property tax on the land is based on its productive value rather than its assessed valuation. A Williamson Act contract automatically renews each year so that it is always 10 years in duration. Enrollment in a Williamson Act contract is voluntary.

The Williamson Act program is administered locally. The City of Lancaster is a party to and enforces the contracts on lands within the incorporated area. The California Department of Conservation has a limited oversight role. There are two methods by which a Williamson Act contract may be terminated. The first and preferred method is through non-renewal. The landowner can file a notice of non-renewal with the City and the contract will expire 10 years from that time. The second method is cancellation. The landowner can petition for cancellation of the contract and, if the City Council agrees to the cancellation, the City will make certain mandatory findings of fact relating either to the cancellation’s consistency with the Williamson Act or to its being “within the public interest.” At that time, the contract is cancelled immediately. A penalty for early termination is levied on the landowner whenever a cancellation is approved. According to the California Department of Conservation (CDC), no properties under a Williamson Act contract are located within the City of Lancaster.

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) is a non-regulatory program of the CDC that inventories the State’s important farmlands and tracks the conversion of farmland to other land uses. The FMMP publishes reports of mapped farmland and conversions every 2 years. The FMMP categorizes farmland on the basis of its soil quality, the availability of irrigation water, current use, and slope, among other criteria. The following are the categories of farmland identified in the FMMP.
**Prime Farmland.** Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.

**Farmland of Statewide Importance.** Farmland similar to prime farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.

**Unique Farmland.** Farmland of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state’s leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.

**Farmland of Local Importance.** Land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county’s board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.

**Grazing Land.** Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock. This category was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen’s Association, University of California Cooperative Extension, and other groups interested in the extent of grazing activities.

The FMMP considers all but grazing land to be important farmland.

**Local**

**City of Lancaster General Plan 2030**

The Plan for the Natural Environment of the City of Lancaster General Plan 2030 includes goals, objectives, policies, and specific actions related to agricultural resources. Those that apply to the proposed project are listed below:

**Goal 3:** To identify the level of natural resources needed to support existing and future development within the City and its sphere of influence, and ensure that these resources are managed and protected.

**Specific Action 3.3.5(b):** Coordinate with the County of Los Angeles and Soil Conservation District to monitor the impacts of agricultural uses within the City limits of Lancaster.

**Objective 3.5:** Preserve land resources through the application of appropriate soils management techniques and the protection and enhancement of surrounding landforms and open space.

**Policy 3.5.3:** Protect lands currently in agricultural production from the negative impacts created when urban and rural land uses exist in close proximity, while recognizing the possibility of their long-term conversion to urban or rural uses.
City of Lancaster Zoning Ordinance

The City of Lancaster Zoning ordinance describes the allowable land uses within the City and the regulations controlling the development of those land uses. It differs from the General Plan in that zoning establishes enforceable development standards while the General Plan identifies future land use patterns. Zoning implements the land use policies described in the General Plan.

The zoning designations for the project site are RR-2.5 and SP. A solar facility of the type being proposed may be allowed in the RR-2.5 zone upon approval of a CUP.

3.2.2 Environmental Setting

The City of Lancaster is situated within the Antelope Valley region of the western Mojave Desert, approximately 70 miles north of downtown Los Angeles. The Antelope Valley is an internally drained basin. The proximity and aspect of the study area to the San Gabriel Mountains combine to create a desert climate. Historically, much of the area was cultivated with alfalfa and small grain crops before groundwater withdrawals were restricted in the 1950s due to a reduction in aquifer levels.

The project area is located near the City of Lancaster’s western boundary on flat terrain abutting the California Aqueduct on the south. Surrounding properties are predominantly vacant undeveloped lands with few residential properties to the north and a suburban style residential subdivision approximately 2,000 feet to the southeast.

According to the State Department of Conservation, approximately 3,800 acres or six percent of land within the City limits is under cultivation (City of Lancaster MEA 2009). The largest portions of agricultural land are located within the western portion of the City west of 70th Street West to the study area’s western limit, between Avenue J and Avenue F, and within the eastern portion of the City east of 40th Street East to the study area’s eastern limit. Smaller areas of agricultural land are located within the urbanizing area of the City (City of Lancaster MEA 2009). The 2012 Los Angeles County Farmland Map depicts Prime Farmlands within the urbanizing area of the City near the intersection of Avenue L and 60th Street West and near the intersection of Avenue L-4 and 60th Street West. Outside the City limits, within the City’s sphere of influence, agricultural lands are primarily designated as Grazing Land with limited Prime Farmland located west of 90th Street West in between Avenue G and Avenue H.

The Los Angeles County Farmland Map was last updated in 2012. Based on the 2012 map, the project site is designated as Grazing Land, with exception of a potential switching station located at the end of Gen-tie Route 4 near the intersection of Avenue J and 130th Street West, which is located in an area designated Farmland of Local Importance (CDC 2013) (Figure 3.2-1).
The CDC identifies the following farmland properties within approximately one mile of the proposed project or project gen-tie lines:

- Prime Farmland located north at the intersection of Avenue L and 85th Street West.
- Prime Farmland located northwest of the proposed project near 110th Street West and Johnson Road.
- Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland located west of Gen-tie Route 3 near the intersection of Coppermill Road and 120th Street West.
- Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance located north of Gen-tie Route 1 between Avenue I and Avenue J.
- Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance located northeast of Gen-tie Route 1 at the intersection of Avenue J and 90th Street West.
- Prime Farmland and Farmland of Local Importance between Gen-tie Route 4 and Gen-tie Route 5, primarily west of 120th Street West; Farmland of Local Importance west of Gen-tie Route 6, between Avenue G and Avenue I, and along Avenue G.
- Prime Farmland and Unique Farmland north of the proposed project, east of Gen-tie Route 6.

3.2.3 Environmental Impacts

This section analyzes the proposed project’s potential to result in significant environmental impacts related to agricultural resources. When an impact is determined to be significant, mitigation measures are identified which would reduce or avoid the impact.

Methodology for Analysis

The proposed project’s effects were compared to the thresholds of significance to determine whether the proposed project would result in a significant change to agricultural resources.

Thresholds of Significance

According to the CEQA Guidelines’ Appendix G Environmental Checklist, the following questions were analyzed and evaluated to determine whether impacts to agricultural resources would be significant. Would the proposed project:

- 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?
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?
• 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]?

The following questions were determined to have no impact during the NOP scoping. These issues are summarized in Section 4, Effects Found Not To Be Significant, and are not discussed further in this section.

• Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of forest land (as defined in PRC section 12220(g)) or timberland (as defined in PRC section 4526)?

• Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

3.2.3.1 Project Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures

Convert Important Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact AG-1</th>
<th>The proposed project would temporarily convert Prime, Unique, or Important agricultural farmland to a non-agricultural use.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Impact Analysis

The project site encompasses approximately 1,191 acres, 7 acres of which would be temporarily disturbed during project construction, including gen-tie routes, temporary offices, and staging areas. The CDC, Division of Land Resource Protection, FMMP, tracks and categorizes land with respect to agricultural resources. The maps for each county are updated every two years. The Los Angeles County Farmland Map was last updated in 2012. Based on the 2012 map, the project site is designated as Grazing Land, with exception of a potential switching station located at the end of Gen-tie Route 4 near the intersection of Avenue J and 130th Street West, which is located in an area designated as Farmland of Local Importance.

The entire 1,092 acres that would be affected by project construction consists of lands which are not designated as Prime, Unique, or Important agricultural farmlands, with exception of the 3.67 acre potential switching station. Accordingly, the proposed project has the potential to convert agricultural land to a nonagricultural use during the life of the project, should Gen-tie Route 4 be selected during final design.

The CDC’s Los Angeles County 2010-2012 Land Use Conversion Table A-13 states that there are 5,671 acres of Farmland of Local Importance in Los Angeles County. The 3.67 acre proposed switching station represents 0.06% of Farmland of Local Importance in Los Angeles County. The conversion of farmland at the proposed switching station is minimal when compared to designated farmland in the County. Additionally, the conversion of farmland is not permanent; the land could be returned to an agricultural use at the end of the life of the proposed project. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.
Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is necessary.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.

Conflict with Existing Zoning or Williamson Act Contract

Impact AG-2 The proposed project would not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract.

Impact Analysis

The project site is not under a Williamson Act contract. While the proposed project would change the use of the project site from vacant undeveloped land to a utility scale solar facility, the proposed project does not extend any public services such as water and sewer that might bring about the changes in land uses from undeveloped to a more urban nature. Since solar facilities are not listed as a compatible use on all lands proposed, the proposed project includes a request for a general plan amendment and zoning change. Solar facilities are permitted on property zoned RR-2.5 with approval of a conditional use permit. Approval of the GPA and ZC would allow agriculture uses on the entire project site. No properties under a Williamson Act contract are located within the City of Lancaster; as such, implementation of the proposed project would not conflict with any existing Williamson Act contract lands. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is necessary.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less Than Significant Impact.

Pressures to Convert Farmland to Non-Agricultural Use

Impact AG-3 The proposed project would not involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use.

Impact Analysis

As described in Impact AG-1, the proposed project would convert the project site to a utility scale solar facility. A majority of the infrastructure necessary for the proposed project would be located onsite, within the project site boundary. The proposed project has the potential to have
limited indirect offsite impacts on active agricultural lands by converting them to non-agricultural uses. During operations, there would be a small amount of occasional traffic resulting from employees going to and from the site and from the occasional employees anticipated for emergency repair or periodic maintenance activities. This level of travel on site access roads would not be higher than that associated with current travel at the project site. Therefore, project operational traffic would not result in indirect effects on agricultural operations in the project area.

During project operation, the number of employees at the project site would be no more than six. Therefore, the project would not result in a substantial new demand for housing in the area that could encourage new home building and the resultant conversion of farmland. Existing City zoning on surrounding properties allows for multiple densities related to many different types of urban development. In accordance with the City’s General Plan, the level of development is considered to be consistent with the limited agricultural activities in the project area.

Therefore, impacts associated with conversion of Farmland to nonagricultural use would be less than significant.

**Level of Significance Before Mitigation**

Less Than Significant Impact.

**Mitigation Measures**

No mitigation is necessary.

**Level of Significance After Mitigation**

Less Than Significant Impact.

**3.2.4 Cumulative Impacts**

Los Angeles County is experiencing a steady loss of important farmlands through conversion to nonagricultural uses. This section describes the trends locally within the City and discusses the implications of farmland conversion within Los Angeles County. In summary, the project would have a less than significant impact on agricultural resources. In terms of its contribution to this cumulative effect, the project is not located on prime farmland. The project site is designated as Grazing Land, with the exception of a potential 400 feet by 400 feet switching station located at the end of Gen-tie Route 4 near the intersection of Avenue J and 130th Street West, which is located in an area designated Farmland of Local Importance. As a result, there is no significant cumulative impact from construction of the proposed project. Given the limited size and type of agricultural lands within the project site, this would be a less than considerable contribution to the loss of agricultural land within the region.