



Farmland Security Zones

A Farmland Security Zone (FSZ) is an area created within an agricultural preserve* by a Board of Supervisors (board) upon request by a landowner or group of landowners.

**An agricultural preserve defines the boundary of an area within which a city or county will enter into Williamson Act contracts with landowners. The boundary is designated by resolution of the board or city council having jurisdiction. Agricultural preserves must generally be at least 100 acres in size.*

For more information, please check out our [FSZ Fact Sheet](#) or [General FSZ Cancellation Process handout](#).

Questions and Answers

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[What new Benefits do Farmland Security Zone Contracts Offer to Landowners?](#)

Farmland Security Zones offer landowners greater property tax reduction. Land restricted by a FSZ contract is valued for property assessment purposes at 65% of its Williamson Act valuation, or 65% of its Proposition 13 valuation, whichever is lower.

New special taxes for urban-related services must be levied at an unspecified reduced rate unless the tax directly benefits the land or living improvements. Cities and special districts that provide non-agricultural services are generally prohibited from annexing land enrolled under a FSZ contract. Lastly, school districts are prohibited from taking FSZ lands for school facilities.

[What is a Farmland Security Zone Contract?](#)

It is a contract between a private landowner and a county that enforceably restricts land to agricultural or open space uses. The minimum initial term is 20 years. Like a Williamson Act contract, Farmland Security Zone contracts self-renew annually, thus unless either party files a “notice of nonrenewal” the contract is automatically renewed each year for an additional year.

[What is the Process for Establishing a Farmland Security Zone Contract?](#)

The process is entirely voluntary for both the landowner and the county. The landowner with a Williamson Act contract must submit a petition for a Farmland Security Zone contract to the local governing body. If the board approves the proposal, it will rezone the subject property as a FSZ. Once the subject property is rezoned, the board will rescind the Williamson Act contract and simultaneously place the same property under a FSZ contract. Landowners who are not participating in the Williamson Act may petition a board to create a FSZ for the purpose of entering into contracts. If two or more landowners with contiguous parcels request the creation of a FSZ, the county will place the parcels in the same FSZ.

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[Can a Landowner who Does not Have Land Currently Enrolled in a Williamson Act Contract Apply for a Farmland Security Zone Contract?](#)

Yes. A landowner or a group of landowners may petition the board to create a Farmland Security Zone for the purpose of entering into FSZ contracts.



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What Type of Land is Eligible for a Farmland Security Zone Contract?

To be eligible for a Farmland Security Zone contract, the subject land must be designated on the [Important Farmland Series maps](#) as predominantly one of the following:

- Prime Farmland
- Farmland of Statewide Importance
- Unique Farmland
- Farmland of Local Importance

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How is a Farmland Security Zone Contract Terminated Through Nonrenewal?

A landowner may initiate nonrenewal of a Farmland Security Zone contract by serving a written notice to the local governing body at least 90 days prior to the renewal date. The FSZ contract then “winds down” over the remaining 19-year term, with the taxes gradually rising back to the full, unrestricted, rate. Upon termination of the FSZ contract, the FSZ designation for that parcel is also terminated.

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Can a Farmland Security Zone Contract be Terminated Through Cancellation?

Yes. However, cancellation of a Farmland Security Zone contract requires additional findings compared with a Williamson Act contract, including approval of the FSZ cancellation findings by the Director of the Department of Conservation.

The requirements necessary for cancellation of a FSZ contract are outlined in GC § 51297. The city/county must make both the Consistency with the Williamson Act and Public Interest findings based on substantial evidence in the cancellation petition. Additional subdivisions, inclusive of GC § 51282, must also be taken into account.



Consistency with the Williamson Act and Public Interest findings:

- That the cancellation is for land on which a notice of nonrenewal has been served pursuant to Section 51245.
- That cancellation is not likely to result in the removal of adjacent lands from agricultural use.
- That cancellation is for an alternative use which is consistent with the applicable provisions of the city or county general plan.
- That cancellation will not result in discontinuous patterns of urban development.
- That there is no proximate noncontracted land which is both available and suitable for the use to which it is proposed the contracted land be put, or, that development of the contracted land would provide more contiguous patterns of urban development than development of proximate noncontracted land.
- That other public concerns substantially outweigh the objectives of this chapter.

In its resolution tentatively approving cancellation of the contract, the city/county shall also make the following findings per Gov Code § 51297(c):

- That no beneficial public purpose would be served by the continuation of the contract.
- That the uneconomic nature of the agricultural use is primarily attributable to circumstances beyond the control of the landowner and the local government.
- That the landowner has paid a cancellation fee equal to 25 percent of the cancellation valuation calculated in accordance with subdivision (b).

Once the city/county approves the tentative resolution, a signed and recorded copy, along with the record of decision supporting all findings for cancellation is required to be sent to the Department. The Director of the Department of Conservation will review the record of the tentative cancellation provided by the County, and may approve the cancellation for a FSZ only if he finds both of the following:

- That there is substantial evidence in the record supporting the decision.
- That no beneficial public purpose would be served by the continuation of the contract.

Please see our [General FSZ Cancellation Process](#) and [Cancellation Petition Advice Paper](#) handouts for more information.

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WILLIAMSON ACT MENU





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