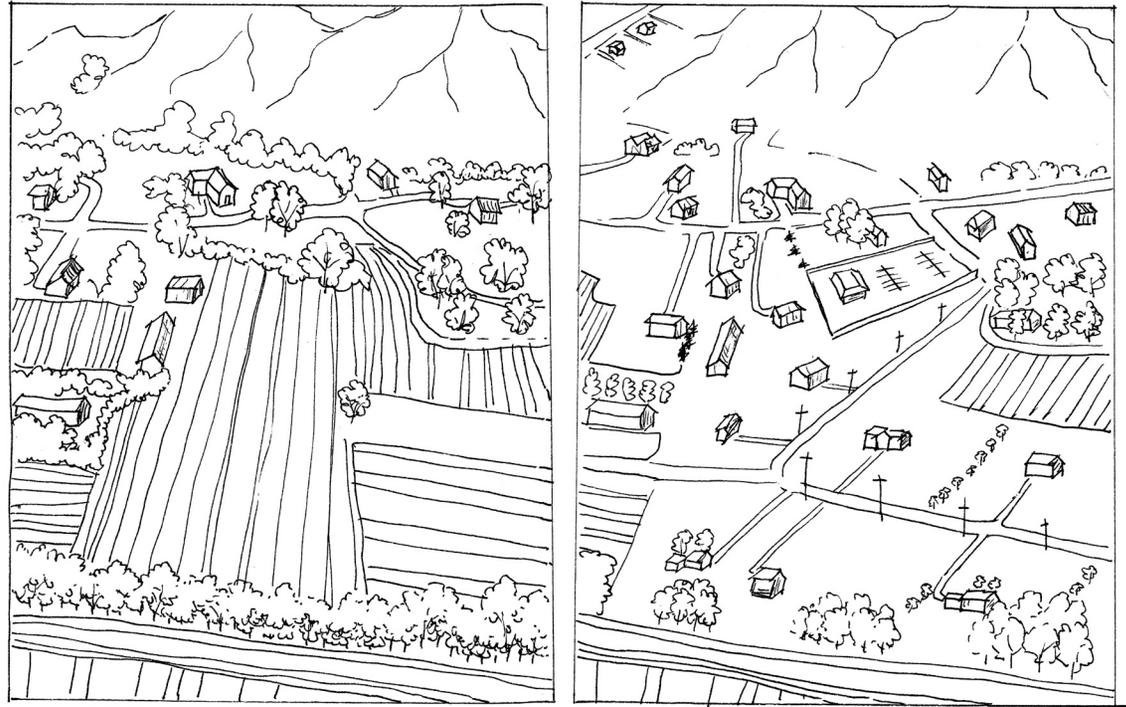


# prime agricultural land

Agricultural land or farmland may include cropland, pasture land, rangeland, forestland, and other rural land. According to the Utah Department of Agriculture, farmers and ranchers generate more than \$1 billion annually in raw products and employ more than 100,000 people. The effect on the economy is much larger because of its links to a variety of industries. For example, farming requires machinery, seed, feed, fertilizer, labor, financial services, and other inputs to produce crops and livestock. A productive farm or ranch also generates taxes to help local communities. In most cases, when farmers subdivide their land the resulting sprawl is a tax drain on communities (Utah Department of Agriculture 3 Dec. 2004).

Agricultural land provides more than simply food production and economic benefits. It also provides open space, wildlife habitat, and water recharge, along with other amenities such as visual quality and landscape diversity. Deer, elk, and many species of birds rely on ranches or farms. Rain and snowmelt seep back into the groundwater in agricultural areas instead of being evaporated on driveways and parking lots.

As Utah's population continues to grow, more and more agricultural land is being lost to development. Fortunately, there are many tools that can be used to protect agricultural land, such as agricultural districts, conservation easements, and transfer of development rights. Agricultural districts permit farmers to form distinctive areas where agriculture is not only protected, but encouraged. Conservation easements are voluntary agreements that allow farmers to retain the right to use their land for ranching and farming while protecting the land from development. The farmer continues to hold title to their property while receiving fair market compensation for their property. Further, they may restrict public access and sell the property as they desire. Transfer of development rights allow landowners to transfer the right to develop from one parcel of land to another, thereby protecting one parcel and allowing higher density development on the other. Other policies and programs include comprehensive planning and cluster zoning (The American Farmland Trust. "The Farm Protection Toolbox." 13 Dec. 2004).



Developing prime agricultural land can change irreversibly the character of a community or region.

## references and further reading:

American Farmland Trust. "Farming on the Edge." 13 Dec. 2004. <<http://www.farmland.org/farmingontheedge/Farming%20on%20the%20Edge.pdf>>.

American Farmland Trust. Oct. 2002. "The Farm Protection Toolbox." 13 Dec. 2004. <[http://www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/27761/FS\\_Toolbox\\_10-02.pdf](http://www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/27761/FS_Toolbox_10-02.pdf)>.

Natural Resources Conservation Service. Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. 3 Dec. 2004. <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp/>>.

Utah Department of Agriculture. 2004. Critical Resource Land Protection. 3 Dec. 2004. <<http://ag.utah.gov/preservation.html>>.