El Dorado Water Agency

Agricultural Lands in the Upper American River Watershed Provide Significant Value

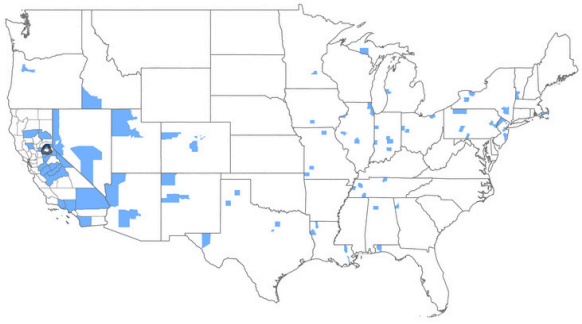
With Adequate Water Agricultural Lands Can Be Significantly Expanded

According to a study completed by El Dorado Water Agency (EDWA), agricultural lands in the upper American River watershed (UARW) are incredibly valuable as they provide numerous ecosystem goods and services such as food, recreation, pollination, climate stability, air quality, and a host of other benefits. In the UARW, farms, orchards, vineyards, and pastures produce food that people and livestock enjoy. These working agricultural lands also support agritourism which generates income and tax revenue for the region. Understanding the economic value of agricultural lands is integral to maintaining a thriving agricultural sector that residents across the country and tourists from across the globe rely on.

AGRICULTURAL LANDS PROVIDE A MULTITUDE OF BENEFITS BEYOND FOOD PRODUCTION

Agricultural production depends on healthy soil, pollinators, a consistent water supply, and a stable climate. With these natural inputs, agricultural lands not only produce food but they can support ecosystem services including groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration, flood risk reduction, and biodiversity. Agricultural lands also provide important cultural value for local communities.

Agricultural production in El Dorado County benefits local communities as well as residents throughout the nation.



Upper American River Watershed (UARW)

Counties benefiting from agriculture produced and distributed from El Dorado County

Map adapted from: Lin, X.; Ruess, P.J.; Marston, L.; Konar, M. Food flows between counties in the United States. Environmental Research Lett. 2019, 14, 084011. https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ab29ae

Agricultural lands in UARW are an incredibly valuable natural asset.

$9,416 per acre
Annual Value

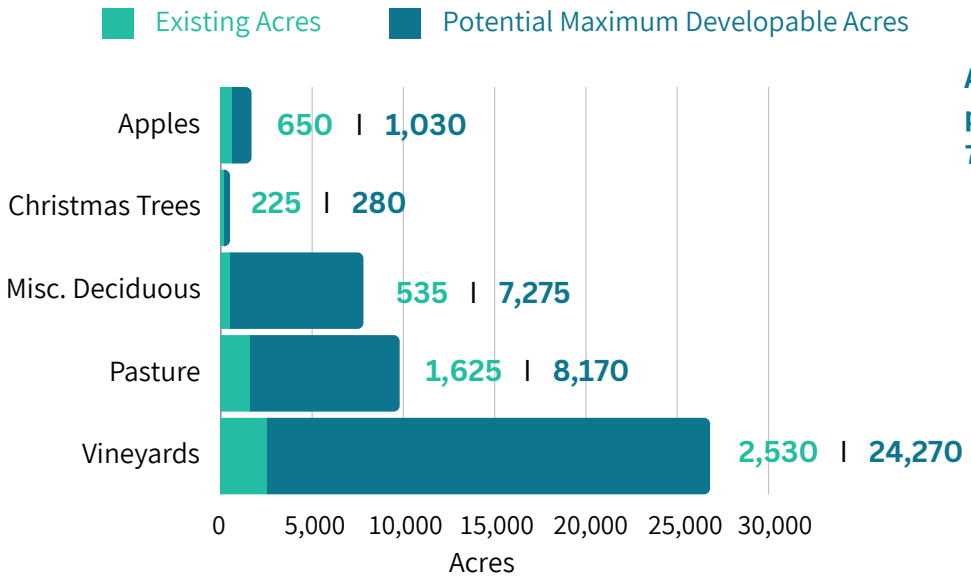
5,994 Acres
in the UARW

$56,000,000*
Estimated Annual Value in the UARW

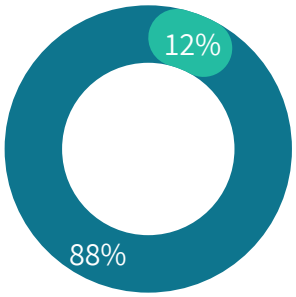
*This annual value increases to around $80 million in El Dorado County alone if non-food and value-added products such as timber and making apples into cider are included.

EL DORADO COUNTY HAS UP TO 41,000 ACRES OF POTENTIAL AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The County of El Dorado (County) adopted General Plan provides policies and guidance for land use and economic development, including specific considerations of agricultural growth. Recognizing the importance of the rural-agricultural economy in the county, in 2020, El Dorado Water Agency worked with the County Agricultural Commissioner and local growers to perform an agricultural development and water demand assessment to evaluate the potential for expanding agricultural economic activities into areas identified in the adopted General Plan. The study evaluated five representative crops in El Dorado County and found that with adequate water supplies there is significant room to expand the County's agricultural footprint.



Agriculture has the potential to expand up to 7-fold in El Dorado County



Calculations for the current and maximum developable footprint for El Dorado County's West Slope are based on physical characteristics such as standards in field size, elevation, slope, and soil quality that make land suitable for irrigation. Source: Davids Engineering and ERA Economics. El Dorado County Agricultural Development Feasibility Assessment. Nov 2020.

Working agricultural lands provide valuable ecosystem goods and services in addition to food production. With investments and adequate water supplies, these valuable agricultural lands can be expanded to provide even greater benefits over a long period of time.

LONG-TERM WATER SUPPLY NEEDED TO SUPPORT PLANNED AGRICULTURAL GROWTH

EDWA is working to secure additional water supplies needed to support the planned agricultural growth that is consistent with fulfilling the County's adopted General Plan. This additional water is critically important as approximately 65 percent of rural-agricultural water use is not currently served by a public water purveyor. This means that farmers often rely on unreliable groundwater from the fractured rock aquifer. Additional surface water is needed to support the County's planned growth and help ensure residents, businesses, farmers, and ranchers have adequate water supplies.

Contact
El Dorado Water Agency
edcwa@edcgov.us
(530) 621-6673

For more information visit: edwateragency.org/Pages/UARWatershed.aspx

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