

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Although the abundance of farmland in Sutton is not as prevalent as in the Core Area, community members still value the open space and green infrastructure that farmland provides, and want to investigate options for retaining the rural, small town character it provides.

There are three larger farms in the Sutton area. The Bannons, which currently produces potatoes, the Callisons, which leases out its fields for hay farming, and the Wallaces, on Mile 58 road, which also produces hay.

The Callison property is also the location of the recently constructed cell tower, which provided a necessary communication link in an area with otherwise sporadic cell phone reception. In addition there are several smaller commercial gardens and greenhouses that produce vegetables for distribution in the Valley and Anchorage.



*Agricultural Equipment photo from
<http://alpinehistoricalpark.org>*

Goal: Promote the continued viability of local agriculture.

Recommendations:

- **Establish priorities for conservation and acquisition of agricultural lands.**

Discussion: Agriculture is an important economic activity and land use in the Sutton area and an important part of local heritage. Farmlands enhance the “rural, small town character” that appeals to Sutton residents. Many residents agree that funds should be spent to preserve agricultural lands and to preserve open spaces.

As land prices rise and development pressures intensify, agricultural land will be increasingly in demand for settlement uses. State law (AS 29.45.060) requires the Borough to assess farmlands at “farm use value” rather than full market value. This helps maintain the economic viability of farmlands in general.

Beyond that, the Borough has limited financial resources to purchase or conserve agricultural lands as open space and natural areas or for other public purposes.

This policy proposes that the Borough inventory and prioritize large-acreage agricultural tracts according to their potential value as public open space, natural areas, and wildlife habitat. Based on that information, the Borough can then target its efforts and resources on the agricultural lands with greatest value as open space.

- Pursue a multi-pronged approach to enhance the continuation and economic success of local agriculture.

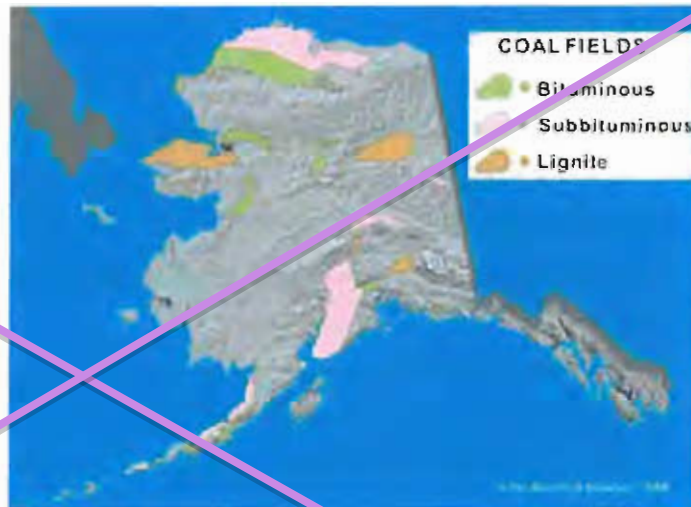
Discussion: Population growth and economic changes are altering the economics of agriculture in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. These changes are eroding the viability of traditional large-scale, stand-alone agriculture. At the same time, agriculture’s potential value is rising as a feature of Sutton’s historic heritage, as a local source of high-quality foodstuffs, as open space and habitat, and as an element of a variety of other productive economic activities.

This policy proposes a set of strategies that, pursued in concert, will help perpetuate Sutton’s farming tradition and assist farm enterprises to realize their full economic potential while also fulfilling public goals. Possible strategies include:

- Purchase of a variety of development rights to conserve open space, natural habitat, and historic buildings consistent with the continuation of active private agriculture
- Encouragement of small farms geared to production of high-value crops and specialized crops (e.g., organic foods) for local and regional markets
- Promotion of a community gardens program to enable residents to rent small tracts of farmland for family use

COAL MINING

One of the most likely heavy industrial land uses to be developed in the Sutton area is coal mining. Usibelli Coal Mine Inc., Sutton Partners LLC (Knoll Acres LLC), Alaska Mental Health Trust and Randy Hobbs own coal leases within the Sutton planning area, and Alaska Earth Sciences has recently been drilling test holes for coal exploration in the area. Several times during the last decade coal mining activities appeared likely to be renewed in the



Alaska Coal Bed Map By Brian Yanity