

(d) Federal agencies may elect to assign the site assessment criteria relative weightings other than those shown in § 658.5 (b) and (c). If an agency elects to do so, USDA recommends that the agency adopt its alternative weighting system (1) through rule-making in consultation with USDA, and (2) as a system to be used uniformly throughout the agency. USDA recommends that the weightings stated in § 658.5 (b) and (c) be used until an agency issues a final rule to change the weightings.

(e) It is advisable that evaluations and analyses of prospective farmland conversion impacts be made early in the planning process before a site or design is selected, and that, where possible, agencies make the FPPA evaluations part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Under the agency's own NEPA regulations, some categories of projects may be excluded from NEPA which may still be covered under the FPPA. Section 1540(c)(4) of the Act exempts projects that were beyond the planning stage and were in either the active design or construction state on the effective date of the Act. Section 1547(b) exempts acquisition or use of farmland for national defense purposes. There are no other exemptions of projects by category in the Act.

(f) Numerous States and units of local government are developing and adopting Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) systems to evaluate the productivity of agricultural land and its suitability for conversion to nonagricultural use. Therefore, States and units of local government may have already performed an evaluation using criteria similar to those contained in this rule applicable to Federal agencies. USDA recommends that where sites are to be evaluated within a jurisdiction having a State or local LESA system that has been approved by the governing body of such jurisdiction and has been placed on the NRCS State conservationist's list as one which meets the purpose of the FPPA in balance with other public policy objectives, Federal agencies use that system to make the evaluation.

(g) To meet reporting requirements of section 1546 of the Act, 7 U.S.C. 4207,

and for data collection purposes, after the agency has made a final decision on a project in which one or more of the alternative sites contain farmland subject to the FPPA, the agency is requested to return a copy of the Form AD-1006, which indicates the final decision of the agency, to the NRCS field office.

(h) Once a Federal agency has performed an analysis under the FPPA for the conversion of a site, that agency's, or a second Federal agency's determination with regard to additional assistance or actions on the same site do not require additional redundant FPPA analysis.

[49 FR 27724, July 5, 1984, as amended at 59 FR 31118, June 17, 1994]

§ 658.5 Criteria.

This section states the criteria required by section 1541(a) of the Act, 7 U.S.C. 4202(a). The criteria were developed by the Secretary of Agriculture in cooperation with other Federal agencies. They are in two parts, (1) the land evaluation criterion, relative value, for which NRCS will provide the rating or score, and (2) the site assessment criteria, for which each Federal agency must develop its own ratings or scores. The criteria are as follows:

(a) *Land Evaluation Criterion—Relative Value.* The land evaluation criterion is based on information from several sources including national cooperative soil surveys or other acceptable soil surveys, NRCS field office technical guides, soil potential ratings or soil productivity ratings, land capability classifications, and important farmland determinations. Based on this information, groups of soils within a local government's jurisdiction will be evaluated and assigned a score between 0 to 100, representing the relative value, for agricultural production, of the farmland to be converted by the project compared to other farmland in the same local government jurisdiction. This score will be the Relative Value Rating on Form AD 1006.

(b) *Site Assessment Criteria.* Federal agencies are to use the following criteria to assess the suitability of each proposed site or design alternative for protection as farmland along with the

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score from the land evaluation criterion described in § 658.5(a). Each criterion will be given a score on a scale of 0 to the maximum points shown. Conditions suggesting top, intermediate and bottom scores are indicated for each criterion. The agency would make scoring decisions in the context of each proposed site or alternative action by examining the site, the surrounding area, and the programs and policies of the State or local unit of government in which the site is located. Where one given location has more than one design alternative, each design should be considered as an alternative site. The site assessment criteria are:

(1) How much land is in nonurban use within a radius of 1.0 mile from where the project is intended?

- More than 90 percent—15 points
90 to 20 percent—14 to 1 point(s)
Less than 20 percent—0 points

(2) How much of the perimeter of the site borders on land in nonurban use?

- More than 90 percent—10 points
90 to 20 percent—9 to 1 point(s)
Less than 20 percent—0 points

(3) How much of the site has been farmed (managed for a scheduled harvest or timber activity) more than 5 of the last 10 years?

- More than 90 percent—20 points
90 to 20 percent—19 to 1 point(s)
Less than 20 percent—0 points

(4) Is the site subject to State or unit of local government policies or programs to protect farmland or covered by private programs to protect farmland?

- Site is protected—20 points
Site is not protected—0 points

(5) How close is the site to an urban built-up area?

- The site is 2 miles or more from an urban built-up area—15 points
The site is more than 1 mile but less than 2 miles from an urban built-up area—10 points
The site is less than 1 mile from, but is not adjacent to an urban built-up area—5 points
The site is adjacent to an urban built-up area—0 points

(6) How close is the site to water lines, sewer lines and/or other local fa-

cilities and services whose capacities and design would promote non-agricultural use?

- None of the services exist nearer than 3 miles from the site—15 points
Some of the services exist more than 1 but less than 3 miles from the site—10 points
All of the services exist within 1/2 mile of the site—0 points

(7) Is the farm unit(s) containing the site (before the project) as large as the average-size farming unit in the county? (Average farm sizes in each county are available from the NRCS field offices in each State. Data are from the latest available Census of Agriculture, Acreage of Farm Units in Operation with \$1,000 or more in sales.)

- As large or larger—10 points
Below average—deduct 1 point for each 5 percent below the average, down to 0 points if 50 percent or more below average—9 to 0 points

(8) If this site is chosen for the project, how much of the remaining land on the farm will become non-farmable because of interference with land patterns?

- Acreage equal to more than 25 percent of acres directly converted by the project—10 points
Acreage equal to between 25 and 5 percent of the acres directly converted by the project—9 to 1 point(s)
Acreage equal to less than 5 percent of the acres directly converted by the project—0 points

(9) Does the site have available adequate supply of farm support services and markets, i.e., farm suppliers, equipment dealers, processing and storage facilities and farmer's markets?

- All required services are available—5 points
Some required services are available—4 to 1 point(s)
No required services are available—0 points

(10) Does the site have substantial and well-maintained on-farm investments such as barns, other storage buildings, fruit trees and vines, field terraces, drainage, irrigation, waterways, or other soil and water conservation measures?

- High amount of on-farm investment—20 points
Moderate amount of on-farm investment—19 to 1 point(s)
No on-farm investment—0 points

(11) Would the project at this site, by converting farmland to nonagricultural use, reduce the demand for farm support services so as to jeopardize the continued existence of these support services and thus, the viability of the farms remaining in the area?

Substantial reduction in demand for support services if the site is converted—10 points
Some reduction in demand for support services if the site is converted—9 to 1 point(s)
No significant reduction in demand for support services if the site is converted—0 points

(12) Is the kind and intensity of the proposed use of the site sufficiently incompatible with agriculture that it is likely to contribute to the eventual conversion of surrounding farmland to nonagricultural use?

Proposed project is incompatible with existing agricultural use of surrounding farmland—10 points
Proposed project is tolerable to existing agricultural use of surrounding farmland—9 to 1 point(s)
Proposed project is fully compatible with existing agricultural use of surrounding farmland—0 points

(c) *Corridor-type Site Assessment Criteria.* The following criteria are to be used for projects that have a linear or corridor-type site configuration connecting two distant points, and crossing several different tracts of land. These include utility lines, highways, railroads, stream improvements, and flood control systems. Federal agencies are to assess the suitability of each corridor-type site or design alternative for protection as farmland along with the land evaluation information described in § 658.4(a). All criteria for corridor-type sites will be scored as shown in § 658.5(b) for other sites, except as noted below:

- (1) Criteria 5 and 6 will not be considered.
- (2) Criterion 8 will be scored on a scale of 0 to 25 points, and criterion 11 will be scored on a scale of 0 to 25 points.

§ 658.6 Technical assistance.

(a) Section 1543 of the Act, 7 U.S.C. 4204 states, “The Secretary is encouraged to provide technical assistance to any State or unit of local government, or any nonprofit organization, as deter-

mined by the Secretary, that desires to develop programs or policies to limit the conversion of productive farmland to nonagricultural uses.” In § 2.62, of 7 CFR part 2, subtitle A, NRCS is delegated leadership responsibility within USDA for the activities treated in this part.

(b) In providing assistance to States, local units of government, and nonprofit organizations, USDA will make available maps and other soils information from the national cooperative soil survey through NRCS field offices.

(c) Additional assistance, within available resources, may be obtained from local offices of other USDA agencies. The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service and the Forest Service can provide aerial photographs, crop history data, and related information. A reasonable fee may be charged. In many States, the Cooperative Extension Service can provide help in understanding and identifying farmland protection issues and problems, resolving conflicts, developing alternatives, deciding on appropriate actions, and implementing those decisions.

(d) Officials of State agencies, local units of government, nonprofit organizations, or regional, area, State-level, or field offices of Federal agencies may obtain assistance by contacting the office of the NRCS State conservationist. A list of Natural Resources Conservation Service State office locations appears in appendix A, § 661.6 of this title. If further assistance is needed, requests should be made to the Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Office of the Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250.

§ 658.7 USDA assistance with Federal agencies’ reviews of policies and procedures.

(a) Section 1542(a) of the Act, 7 U.S.C. 4203, states, “Each department, agency, independent commission or other unit of the Federal Government, with the assistance of the Department of Agriculture, shall review current provisions of law, administrative rules and regulations, and policies and procedures applicable to it to determine whether any provision thereof will prevent such