

**AGRICULTURE IN**

**GOLDEN PLAINS SHIRE**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Golden Plains Shire spans the Traditional lands of the Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar people. We acknowledge them as the Traditional Owners and Custodians.

Council pays its respects to Wadawurrung Elders past, present and emerging. Council also respects Eastern Maar Elders, past, present and emerging.

## Victorian agriculture is a cornerstone of our economy

*“Victoria’s farmers, agribusinesses and surrounding communities are an integral part of our way of life. They feed us, clothe us and export our products to the world. Agriculture creates essential jobs in our regions and supports the productive management of our landscapes.”*

*Strong, Innovative, Sustainable; A New Strategy for Agriculture in Victoria, 2020*



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## Executive Summary

In planning for the growth of Golden Plains Shire it is important to safeguard food-producing areas and plan for future agricultural needs.

### Land use trends for agriculture include:

- Fewer and larger farms
- Increased concentration of farm output
- More intensive farming techniques
- Closer integration of agrifood chain
- Competing land uses
- High level of land use conflict
- Increased land speculation
- High land prices
- Limits to farm expansion.

Compared with other regions, Golden Plains agricultural land does not have the highest class value, but is projected to be less severely affected by climate change, making the protection of agriculture areas relatively important as reliance on its productivity is likely to increase as suitability for agriculture declines in other parts of the state.

Identification of **valuable** agricultural land should go beyond soil values. All agricultural land in Golden Plains Shire is valuable whether for food, fibre or energy production amongst other things.

Already, Golden Plains Shire supports investment and expansion of intensive agriculture in the Golden Plains Food Production Precinct.

### To support agriculture into the future, the Golden Plains Growth Strategy will need to:

- Identify areas suitable to protect for agricultural uses.
- Provide certainty that these areas will continue as key agricultural areas into the future.

- Protect areas of significant water infrastructure investment.
- Limit non-farming and incompatible uses that would restrict ongoing productive use of land for agricultural purposes.
- Protect buffers of identified areas from encroaching sensitive uses such as dwellings to ensure agricultural activities continue without restrictions.

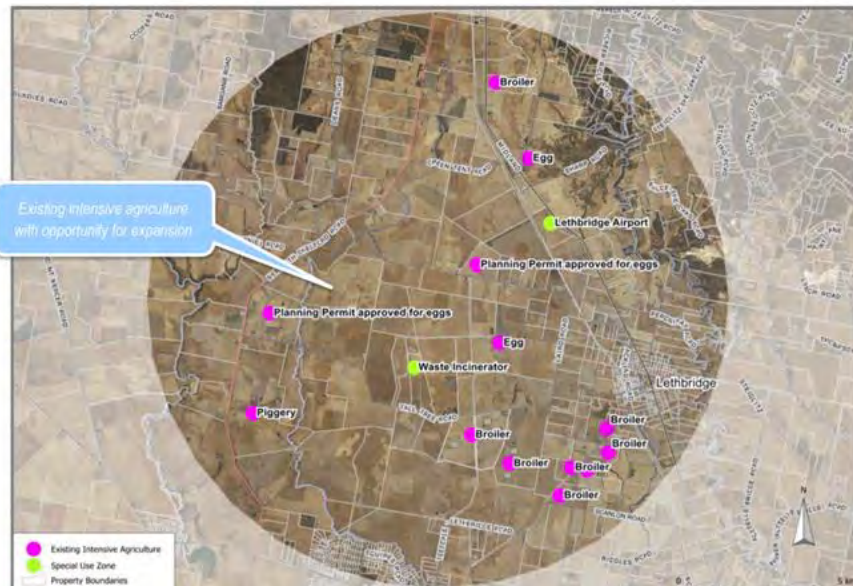
The Golden Plains Agriculture Map on page 41, identifies the agricultural circumstances within Golden Plains Shire to assist in planning for the balance of future urban growth and valuing agricultural land to produce the food and resources for a growing population.

## Agriculture in Golden Plains Shire

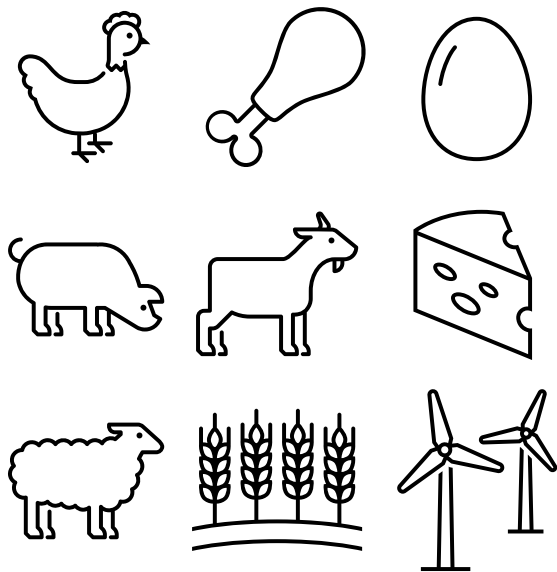
The main driver of economic activity in Golden Plains Shire is the agricultural sector, employing 26% of the Shire's workforce and comprising 20% of the Shire's economy.

Golden Plains Shire has a strong agricultural sector, with a history of wool, sheep and grain production. Now-a-days the Shire is seeing strong growth in intensive agriculture, including poultry, pigs, beef and goat dairy as well as the expansion of viticulture in the Moorabool Valley. This in turn has driven an increase in the region's tourism offering, with visitors attracted to the region's picturesque wineries, gourmet food producers, agri-tourism and the monthly Golden Plains Farmers Market.

Golden Plains Shire is one of the leading producers of eggs and chicken meat in Victoria, producing nearly a quarter of Victoria's eggs. Council is encouraging continued growth and investment in intensive agriculture, by establishing the Golden Plains Food Production Precinct near Lethbridge, which is on track to become one of Victoria's premier areas for intensive agriculture development and expansion.



Golden Plains produces:



Looking to the future, Golden Plains Shire recognises the need to plan and manage the competing interests of a growing population whilst maintaining the Shire's highly valued rural character and resource.

# Golden Plains Community Vision 2040

## By 2040...

- We want a diversity of quality rural and urban living alternatives that balances growth and retains a strong country feel.
- We need to ensure our environment is maintained with appropriate practices and stewardship of our natural assets for future generations.
- We want to value and preserve our natural ecosystems, landscapes, features, open spaces, bushland and connection to cultural heritage.
- We want to promote positive attitudes and behaviours to land use, waste management, climate change and natural resource management.
- We want to embrace clean and green practices, including environmentally sustainable design, energy efficiency and green energy solutions.
- We want access to a range of employment opportunities and pathways.
- We want to promote and improve the regional economy through partnerships, innovation and support for local producers, agriculture and businesses.

## Community Vision 2040:

*“We want to promote and improve the regional economy through partnerships, innovation and support for local producers, agriculture and businesses.”*



# Golden Plains Council Plan 2021- 2025

## What we are going to do...

2.3.1 Identify areas across the Shire that balance future urban growth whilst maintaining rural and township character.



3.3.2 Support and partner with the community on environmental initiatives.

3.4.1 Implement local approaches to address and mitigate climate change and its impact on health.



3.4.2 Promote, encourage and advocate the use of sustainable and clean energy and technology.

4.2.1 Provide support to local businesses including farms and small business.



4.5.1 Identify and advocate for investment opportunities, partnerships and projects.

## How we are going to do it...

Continue strategic land use planning that identifies suitable areas for potential growth.

Consider planning and rezoning amendments that provide a diversity of land use to support and service liveability and growth including commercial, industrial, rural and residential land.

Tackle climate change and its impact on health including implementing the Emission Reduction Action Plan and Climate Change Action Plan.

Scope, encourage and further develop projects and initiatives that explore the use of renewable energy and carbon neutral practices.

Implement the Economic Development, Tourism and Investment Attraction Strategy 2022-2032

*Golden Plains Shire Council Plan 2021-2025*

## State Planning Policy on Agriculture

*Clause 14.01 - Golden Plains Planning Scheme*

To protect the state's agricultural base by preserving productive farmland.

To encourage sustainable agricultural land use.

Support new opportunities in farming and fisheries.

Support agroforestry and timber plantations that are compatible with surrounding farming practice.

Support horticulture production.

Support the development of intensive animal industries.

## Council's role in Agriculture

Provide support to local businesses and arms including:

- Support and incentives for agriculture;
- Developing relationships with food producers to support access to local produce;

Identify and advocate for investment opportunities, partnerships and projects.

*(Golden Plains Shire Council Plan 2021-2025)*

The Shire's vision includes:

- The local economy will grow, particularly in township development and **rural based and farming industries.**

*(Clause 2.02 Vision - Golden Plains Planning Scheme)*





## Clause 2.03-4 Agriculture:

Council aims to support sustainable agriculture in the Shire by:

- Protecting the role of agricultural land as an economically valuable resource.
- Facilitating more intensive and diversified use of rural land for higher value products, including timber and agroforestry.
- Maintaining farm sizes.
- Minimising the potential for conflict between sensitive uses and agricultural practices.
- Discouraging dwellings and house lot excisions on rural properties.
- Directing timber plantations to land that is already cleared and is used for grazing or cropping.

## Animal Industries:

Council seeks to:

- Support the development of intensive animal industries.
- Locate intensive animal production uses within the Food Precinct.
- Encourage quality design of intensive animal production developments so they do not cause any unreasonable impacts on surrounding residential land uses.
- Ensure that the use and development of land for intensive animal production does not detrimentally impact on the environment and minimises the downstream impacts on the water catchment.

## Protecting agricultural land

References to 'productive farmland' and 'farmland of strategic significance' in state policies suggest that the protection of agricultural land should prioritise land considered to have a higher agricultural quality.

There is a broad range of views on criteria to identify agricultural areas with strategic value and significance including:

- Land capability - naturally fertile land with minimal constraints, used for soil-based agriculture.
- Water access - farmland with access to a secure water supply.
- Resilience and adaptability - particularly to climate change.
- Existing land use and integration - land that is currently used for intensive agricultural purposes and supports the viability of an agricultural area.
- Other considerations (constraints) - factors that may suggest the land is not as suited to agriculture.

Bushfire and flooding are significant issues across the municipality. Golden Plains also includes areas that have experienced salinisation of soil and water resources, with resultant impacts on agriculture and water resources.

The recent *Consultation Paper on Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land* highlights the importance of protecting **all** agricultural land, for two reasons:

1. Protecting all agricultural land would mitigate further pressure on 'non-strategic' agricultural land.
2. Protecting all agricultural land would ensure enough land is safeguarded for agriculture to ensure that Melbourne retains sufficient flexibility and resilience for future challenges to the city's food production.

Referenced from: *Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land, Consultation Paper, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, May 2020.*



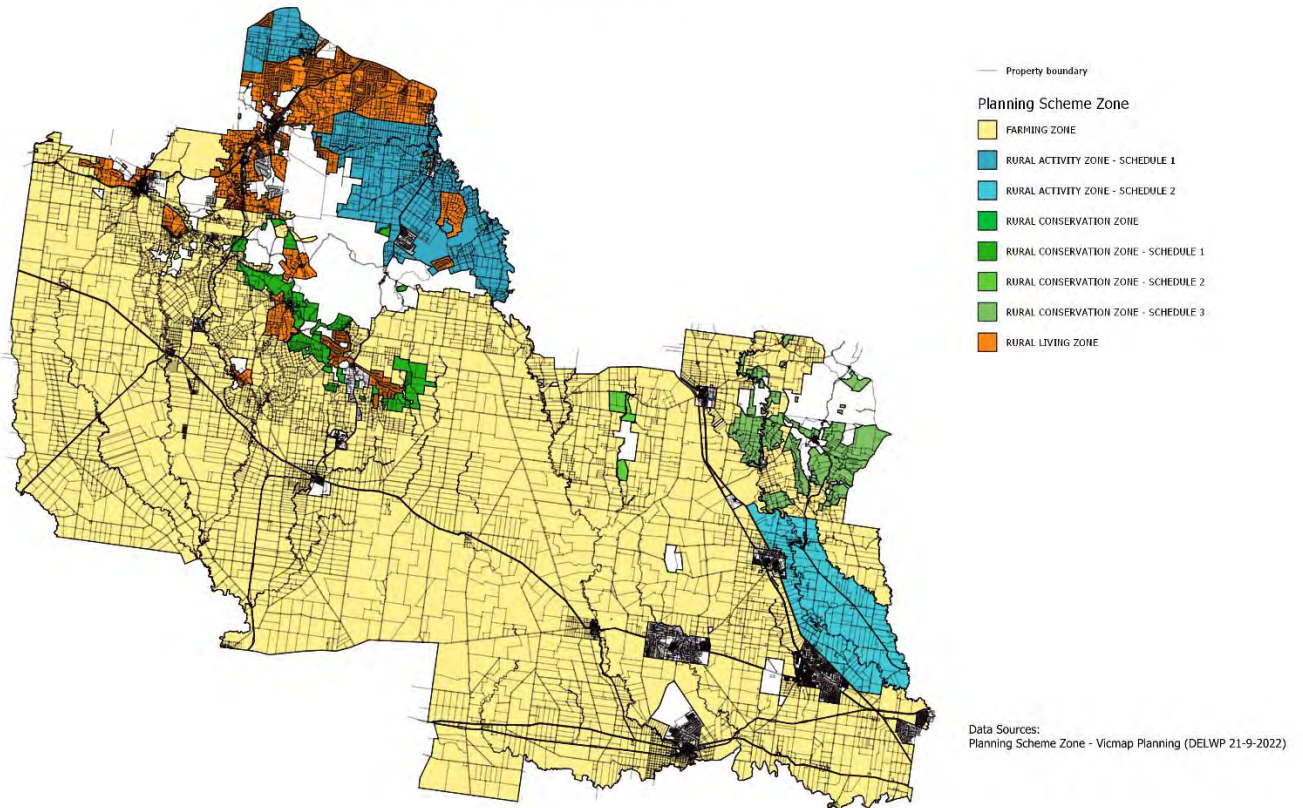
## Suite of Rural Zones in Golden Plains Shire

All rural zones provide for the use of land for agriculture. The primary use of land for farming is implicit in the Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone. However, in the Rural Conservation Zone and Rural Living Zone, farming is subordinate to other land uses or to the environmental values of the land. The following map illustrates the distribution of these zones across the Shire.

<b>Farming Zone (FZ)</b>	A zone that is strongly focused on protecting and promoting farming and agriculture
<b>Rural Activity Zone (RAZ)</b>	A mixed use rural zone that caters for farming and other compatible land uses
<b>Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ)</b>	A conservation zone that caters for rural areas with special environmental characteristics
<b>Rural Living Zone (RLZ)</b>	A zone that caters for residential use in a rural setting

# Rural Zones in Golden Plains Shire

Rural Zones in Golden Plains Shire



## Farming Zone

The Farming Zone is designed to be applied where:

- farmers require certainty about undertaking normal farming practices and need the flexibility to change farming practices in the future
- farming is the principal activity in the area and the protection of productive farmland is of primary strategic importance
- the farmland is of state, regional or local significance in terms of agricultural production or employment
- the farmland has physical attributes that are scarce or essential to sustaining particular agricultural activities
- pressures to use and develop land for nonfarming purposes pose a significant threat to the supply and productivity of farmland in the area.
- the scale, nature and intensity of farming uses in the area have the potential to significantly impact upon sensitive land uses, such as housing
- the efficient and effective use of agricultural infrastructure will be maximised

Currently the Farming Zone applies extensively across the Shire and allows for broad hectare cropping, animal production, intensive animal production forestry plantation areas, renewable energy as well as scope for a range of other uses including industry and place of assembly. This provides flexibility within rural communities for economic and tourism investment without specific commercial or industrial zoning.

There is a schedule to the Farming Zone that sets both the minimum subdivision area and the minimum area for which no permit is required for a dwelling at 100 hectares. There is also setback requirements.

## The Rural Activity Zone

The Rural Activity Zone is designed to be applied to rural areas where:

- farming is an important activity in the area but the planning objectives identified for the land support the establishment of other land uses
- a mixed-use function would support farming activities in the area, assist in preventing the unplanned loss of productive agricultural land elsewhere, or allow for the logical and efficient provision of infrastructure
- the use of land in the area for non-farming purposes would not compromise the long term productivity of surrounding farmland
- appropriate buffers can be provided between different land uses so that land use conflicts are avoided
- the planning authority has developed a clear policy about how discretion in the zone will be exercised.

The Rural Activity Zone applies in mixed use rural areas where the mix of uses complements the agricultural, environmental and landscape values of an area.

There are two distinct areas of Rural Activity Zone in the Golden Plains Shire. One is defined by Schedule 1 and is in the north of the Shire. The pattern of development reflects the gold mining history and extensive areas of rural living use.

The other area is the Moorabool Valley and it is defined as Schedule 2. It is distinctive landscape features of enclosed river valleys, escarpments and potential for tourism and recreation alongside productive agriculture.

## Rural Conservation Zone

The Rural Conservation Zone is designed to be applied to rural areas where:

- the protection of the environmental features of the land is of primary strategic importance including, for example, native vegetation, flora and fauna, significant habitats, or they could relate to the visual qualities of the land
- the environmental features of the land are scarce and strict controls are required to prevent the further loss or decline of those features
- land use and development could directly or indirectly threaten the environmental values of the land and strict controls are required to manage this.

If the environmental or landscape features cover a large rural area, the Rural Conservation Zone is likely to be suitable. However, if the features are widely dispersed or fragmented and the surrounding land has been substantially altered (for example, broadacre farming areas with wildlife corridors), the other rural zones may be more appropriate supplemented with overlays.

There are three distinct Rural Conservation Zones across the Shire. Schedule 1 applies to the North west Central Area in proximity to the Enfield State Forest. Schedule 2 applies

to Bamganie-Woodbourne characterised by undulating plains and significant native vegetation and farming activities. Schedule 3 applies to Sheoaks-Steiglitz and is characterised by undulating plains, steeply sloped valleys, including the Moorabool River and Sutherlands Creek and significant remnant vegetation.

In all zones, it is recognised that agriculture is an integral part of the local rural economy and character of the greater region.

### VCAT Planning decisions

A policy gap that was identified in three separate VCAT decisions [‘Parkin v Golden Plains SC [2016] VCAT 1391 (18 August 2016), Campbell v Golden Plains SC [2018] VCAT 823 (30 May 2018) and Webster v Golden Plains SC [2020] VCAT 71 (20 January 2020)] was the absence of any policy that articulate Council’s particular requirements for a Farm Management Plan to justify the use and development of a dwelling on a smaller FZ lot in conjunction with a proposed agricultural use.

An additional policy gap identified in VCAT decision ‘Welsh v Golden Plains SC [2019] VCAT 1403 (24 September 2019)’ was the absence of any policy in the Shire identifying the preferred locations for racing dog keeping and training.

### Planning scheme review recommendations

Continue work around township growth boundaries to better define town edges and address interface issues and ensure sufficient land is available for growth.

Consider the role and actions Council can take to assist the transition of less viable industries such as small broiler farms, to productive land uses.

Consider policy guidance which could be incorporated to manage interface issues between the urban growth boundary around townships and the farming zone.

Develop guidelines to assist applicants in understanding the requirements of Farm Management Plans for consideration of dwellings used in conjunction with an agricultural use on smaller lots in the Farming Zone. Incorporate these into the planning scheme if permitted by DELWP.

Identify the preferred location for racing dog keeping and training and introduce policy guidance into the PPF.

*Golden Plains Planning Scheme Review, 2022*

## The Food Production Precinct



The Golden Plains Food Production Precinct is a 4,000 hectare area of privately owned farm-zoned land, located west of Lethbridge. The precinct has been supplied with an 18km town water supply funded through \$11.78 million worth of combined grants from Federal government, state government, Golden Plains Shire and Barwon Water.

The new water supply will generate \$160 million worth of investment and more than 700 jobs over 10 years. Over \$50 million in direct investment has been approved for development in the precinct, including free range egg farms and a \$20 million fertiliser plant.

Golden Plains supports the growth of intensive agriculture in the precinct, with over a decade of strategic work undertaken to establish an area where intensive agriculture can invest and expand.

Planning decisions should avoid encroachment of buffers from other uses into the designated area for intensive agriculture that is the Food Production Precinct.



# Right to Farm

## What is the 'right to farm'?

Complaints often arise when land uses in proximity to each other are incompatible and create conflict. In the case of farming, the use of land can generate dust, odour and noise through such activities as the application of chemicals and the running of farm machinery on roads.

The 'right to farm' refers to the concept that farmers should be able to conduct lawful agricultural activities without being hindered by complaints from neighbours or other land users. Generally, the right-to-farm issues are more prevalent on the urban fringe, where urban and rural uses of land occur side by side as people move into a peri-urban or country town locations in search of the amenity of a rural setting.

The 'right to farm' does not mean that farming activities are exempt from other environmental regulations that safeguard risks to environmental and community amenity (e.g. regulations that control chemical use, air pollution, noise and management of odours). There are broader requirements under environmental risks and amenity planning law and an amendment to the Victoria Planning Provisions at Clause 13.07-1S to include protection of human health and safety. The Department of Environment Land, Water and Planning have confirmed that 'other uses' includes agriculture. The amendment aligns with the broader terms of reference under which the EPA now operate.

The Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA Victoria) oversees environmental and amenity issues in accordance with the *Environment Protection Act 2017*. It regulates high-risk industries through works approvals and has compliance

and enforcement powers to ensure all industries, including farming, comply with legislated environmental standards.

*Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land, Consultation Paper, Department of Environment. Land, Water and Planning, May 2020.*

## Supporting diversification; value-adding and innovation

Land uses underpinned by an agricultural activity can provide opportunities for diversification and value-adding, for example where wine production is combined with restaurants and tourist accommodation. However, this kind of value-adding can also pose risks to the ongoing agricultural use of the land.

A balance is required to ensure that on-farm diversification does not exceed a level beyond which agriculture becomes a subordinate use of the land.

*Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land, Consultation Paper, Department of Environment. Land, Water and Planning, May 2020* does not recommend any actions to reform Rural industry to further facilitate value adding on-farm.

## Other land uses in Agricultural areas

State Planning Policy recognises the importance of peri-urban areas in the provision of airports, quarries, waste and resource recovery centres, water treatments, energy and utilities. Other alternative uses which are becoming more popular in agricultural areas include places of assembly, where people congregate for entertainment or other spiritual or cultural activities.

Camping and caravan parks provide a relatively low-cost option for visitors to experience the region, or for temporary workers, but become a 'de facto' residential settlement contrary to the policy intent to limit residential development in agricultural areas.

### Managing subdivision and dwelling development in Agricultural areas

High levels of land speculation and pressure to accommodate urban development and non-agricultural uses are principal sources of pressure on agricultural land. If not managed, these pressures can lead to the permanent loss of agricultural land, inflated land prices that are disproportionate to the income the land can generate from farming, higher operational costs (e.g. council rates), limits on agricultural uses and increases in land use conflicts.

Emergent COVID demographic data shows a decrease in Melbourne's population with population increase in the 150 km radius/ two (2) hour commute from Melbourne.

Although state policy seeks to limit new 'lifestyle' housing developments in rural areas, in practice there is a real threat that many new dwellings constructed in rural areas do not have a farming purpose, and are instead sought for 'tree change' or a 'rural lifestyle'. This leads to the unplanned and incremental conversion of agriculture to residential use.

State Policy can be subjective with little guidance on how to apply the policy. VCAT decisions provide some objective guidance on subdivision and dwelling applications. The following are examples, identified by Agriculture Victoria which give strong guidance to the protection of productive agricultural land and prevention of subdivision and concentration of lots which

are likely to change the general use and character of the rural area.

- Minimum lot size re-subdivision and or subdivision to create 'as of right' for a dwelling. *Estate of JE Walker v Wangaratta RCC [2021] VCAT 125*
- Apparent weight given to surrounding use including rural lifestyle contrary to the purpose of in support of a dwelling, *Estate of JE Walker v Wangaratta RCC [2021] VCAT 125*
- Lifestyle dwelling land use with justification through token Agricultural use of land (Hobby farm). *Kennedy v Baw Baw SC [2022] VCAT 787, Strachan v Latrobe CC [2022] VCAT 35*

In the case above, consideration is given as to whether a dwelling is reasonably required to support the farming activity. The Member agreed with the Council that 15 hours of work per week associated to the agricultural use of tending 10 sheep, 60 chickens and a market garden do not require a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week presence on the site.

- Succession planning, including dwellings for family members on separately saleable lots. *Stoll v Baw Baw SC [2018] VCAT 603, Pincott & Ors v Baw Baw SC [2012] VCAT 1137*

*In the above Stoll case, the Tribunal supported Council's decision that an additional dwelling on a small lot without consolidation of adjoining lots in the same ownership, will fragment the farming unit.*

*Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land, Consultation Paper, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, May 2020.*

<https://www.austlii.edu.au/>



## Local planning policy in Golden Plains Shire

Clauses 2.03-4 and Schedule to Clause 35.07

In the Farming Zone, a dwelling is an 'as of right' use if the land meets the minimum lot size requirement of 100ha.

This tool is used in response to pressure for lifestyle residential development and hobby farming in rural areas. Isolated residential development lacks access to social and physical services and reduces the capacity of an area to undertake agricultural production as conflicts can arise between residential and farming land uses. Residential development is not supported outside the township boundaries,

### *Protecting Farming Zoned land from non-farming residential mitigates:*

- *Land use conflict in rural areas;*
- *Inflated rural land prices;*
- *The creation of 'sensitive use' buffers*

Opportunities to further protect farming land and improve tools to prevent encroachment of non-farming residential use include:

- Seek amendment of the Victoria Planning Provisions to align the Farming Zone requirements with the Rural Activity Zone, where all dwellings require a permit.
- Advocate for the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning policy to better protect agricultural land.
- Advocate for Statewide policy to address demand for affordable housing in appropriately zoned areas close to services and infrastructure.
- Advocate for a statewide formula or model for Farm Management Plans including referral of Farm Management Plans to Agriculture Victoria so as to provide a consistent approach and determinant to whether a dwelling is required to support a farming activity.

Note: The Victoria Planning Provisions currently includes a requirement that the responsible authority must consider any Integrated Land Management Plan (LMP) prepared for the site.

It is noted that there is no apparent definition or guidance as to what a LMP should contain.

- Use of 'domestic envelopes' to minimise domestic creep on agricultural land. Baw Baw use a local policy: *Limiting a dwelling and ancillary buildings and facilities, to within a 2000 square metre envelope*
- Include Section 173 agreements on title for all permitted dwellings as follows:
  - The development and continued use of a dwelling in the Farming Zone has been permitted on the basis that the dwelling is

reasonably required for the operation of the agricultural activity conducted on the land in accordance with an endorsed business plan or approved alternative, and the dwelling will only be used on that basis.

- The dwellings must not be subdivided from the lot in the future, and the lot must not be subdivided to increase the number of lots, by excision or otherwise.
- That the owner acknowledges and accepts the possibility of nuisance from adjoining agricultural operations including animal production, spray drift, agricultural machinery use, pumps and associated hours of operation necessary for agricultural production.



## Managing the rural-urban interface

*Adapted from: Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land, Consultation Paper, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, May 2020.*

Land at the interface of urban areas and rural land tends to be highly contested and is most pressed to accommodate land uses to service an urban population. Conflicts arise because land parcels are larger in size and more affordable relative to urban land, and there is ever increasing market pressure to convert rural to urban uses.

Agricultural land on the surrounding edges of residential development is also valued for the rural amenity it affords to township areas, The farmland creates a sense of spaciousness and provides the 'country' context to the country town feel of residential areas.

*Clear and strategic policy guidance on land use and development at the interface is the key to safeguarding and supporting the integrity of agricultural land.*

### Key considerations for other land uses in and adjoining Agricultural areas:

- Rural character - responding to the distinctive landscape setting.
- Site layout - minimise the visual impact on views from roads and key vantage points
- Site coverage - minimise the extent of site coverage to reduce dominance on the landscape
- Building height - avoiding unintended landmarks rather than blending with the landscape
- Side and rear setbacks - prevent potential amenity impacts
- Landscaping - protect existing vegetation and encourage landscaping with the surrounding typology.
- Detailed design - sympathetic or innovative design and finishes in muted, earthy colours with limited light spill
- Sustainable transport - access to a road in a Road Zone.
- Access - minimise width of crossovers and number of access points and avoid vegetation removal.
- Vehicle parking - minimise extensive areas of hardstanding to protect the rural character.
- Safety - prioritise protection of human life and reduce bushfire vulnerability of communities. Encourage development that does not require vegetation removal.
- Infrastructure - optimize utility infrastructure and do not exceed infrastructure capacity.

## Future Farming in the – Grampians Region

*Agricultural Value Add and Supply Chain Analysis, Regional Development Victoria - Grampians Region, September 2021*

The future of farming across the Grampians Regional Development Area included the north and western parts of Golden Plains Shire.

The aim of the analysis was to identify opportunities to:

- **Reduce imports** through local substitutions, bringing economic activity into the regional economy.
- **Retain** as much of the 'value adding processes' and **distribution** within the regional economy by value adding in the region rather than exporting outside the region to value add.
- **Improve the functioning of the overall system.**

### Land use trends for agriculture in Grampians Region:

- Unprecedented global demand;
- Heightened consumer expectations;
- Disruptive technology;
- Responding to climate change;
- Consolidating communities;
- New competition.

### Opportunities for supporting farming in the Grampians Region:

- Establishing a major poultry processing facility;
- Facilitating growing demand for poultry sheds (duck)
- Establishing a regional feed mill
- Facilitating waste to energy
- Alternative crops
- Supporting the relocation of food processors from Melbourne to the regions.



## Future Farming in the 100km radius of Melbourne

*Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land, Consultation Paper, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, May 2020.*

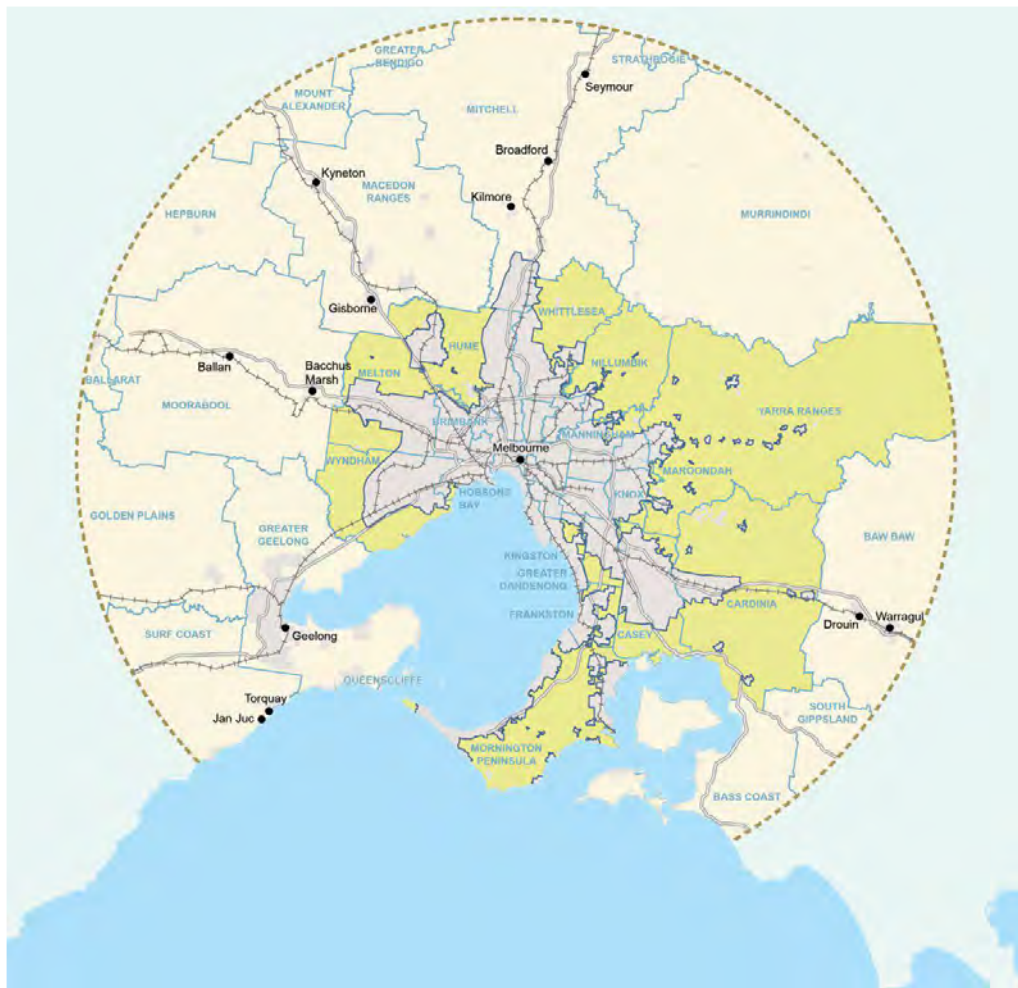
This Paper identifies actions intended to reform legislative provisions to support agriculture in peri-urban areas.

The **study area** below extends 100km from central Melbourne.

Golden Plains Shire sites within the western study area and is identified as an important non-urban break between Melbourne and Geelong.

The region features a mix of coastal grassy plains and volcanic plains, with some areas having more pronounced topography such as hills, ranges and woodlands.

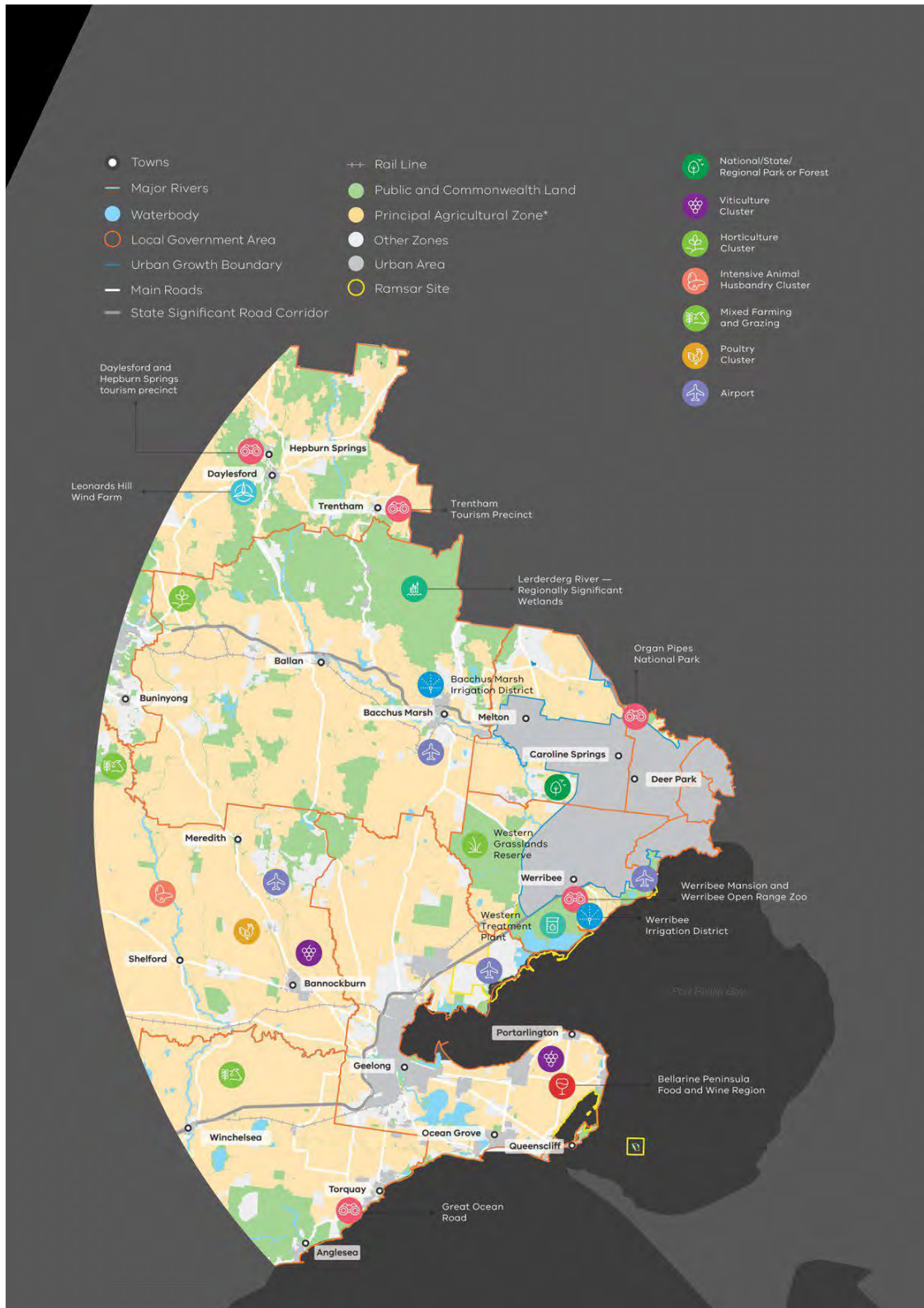
The significant agricultural activity in this region is primarily services by recycled water and high quality soil, and consists of market gardens and horticulture, broadacre cropping, grazing, intensive agriculture and hobby farms.



The region features significant reserves with conservation, heritage and cultural values, including drystone walls, internationally significant and biologically diverse wetlands and marine sanctuaries,

Aboriginal middens and burial sites, and tourism assets. Transport gateways and infrastructure in the region support other important economic sectors such as quarries and water treatment plants.

Key Features West



### Land use trends for agriculture in 100km radius of Melbourne:

- Fewer and larger farms
- Increased concentration of farm output
- More intensive farming techniques
- Closer integration of agrifood chain
- Competing land uses
- High level of land use conflict
- Increased land speculation
- High land prices
- Limits to farm expansion.

### Key Drivers affecting the agricultural sector in 100km radius of Melbourne:

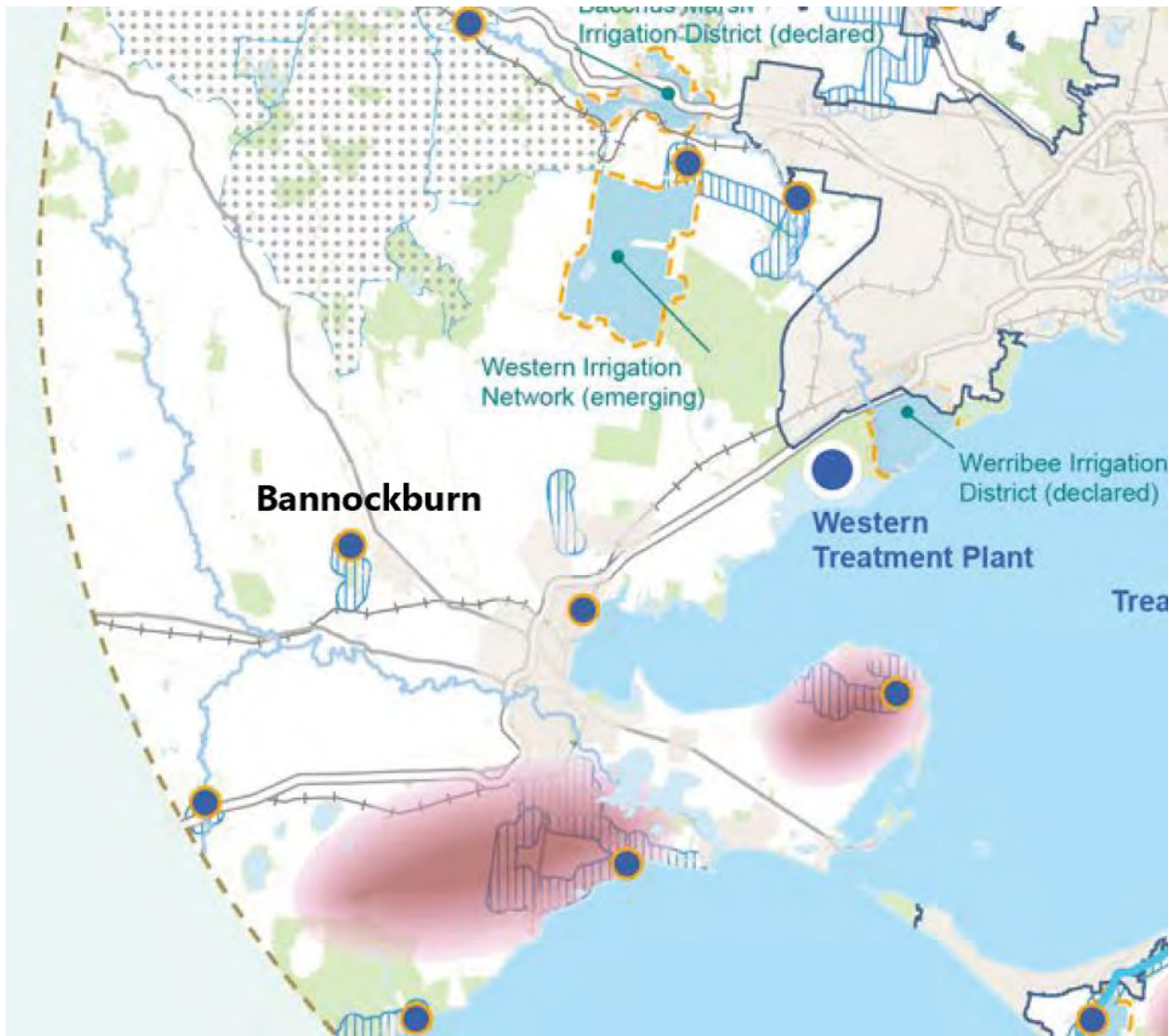
### Future-proofing agricultural land:

The impacts of climate change on agriculture include lower rainfalls and reduced reliability of water resources, more frequent and intense flood events and higher mean temperatures. Compared with other regions, Melbourne's agricultural land is projected to be less severely affected by climate change, making the protection of peri-urban areas even more important as reliance on its productivity is likely to increase as suitability for agriculture declines in other parts of the state.



*“Access to fit-for-purpose water underpins productive agriculture.”*

Recycled water and outfall pipes are identified near Bannockburn, associated with the Sewerage Treatment Plant



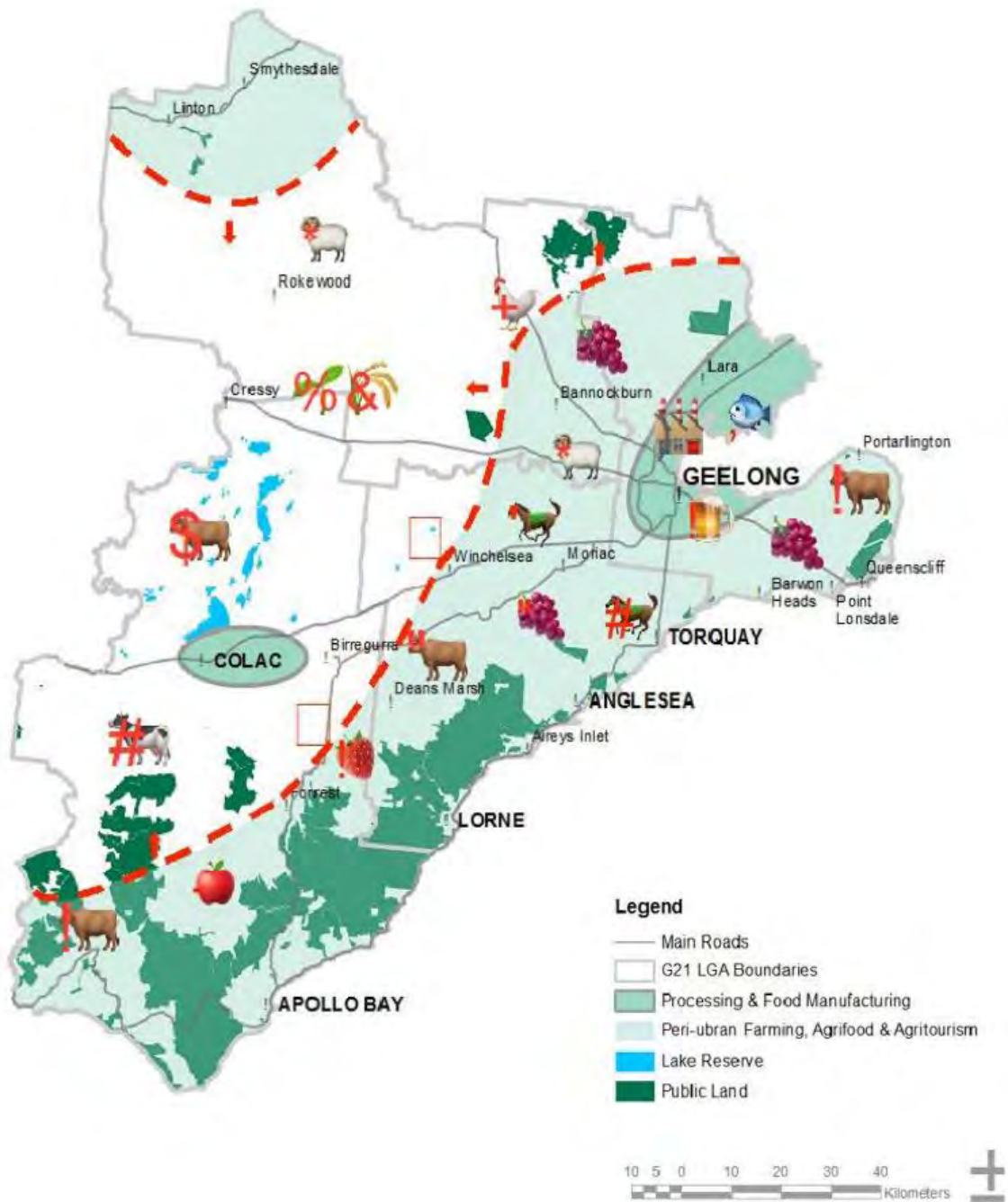
- Irrigation District
- Buffer (500m) Around Irrigation Districts\*
- Recycled Water and Outfall Pipes 1km Buffer
- Indicative Recycled Water Supply Areas
- Declared Special Water Supply Catchment Areas
- Local Wastewater Treatment Plant (With 1km Buffer)
- Major Wastewater Treatment Plant
- South East Outfall
- Major Rivers
- Waterbody
- Study Area — 100km from Central Melbourne
- Urban Growth Boundary
- Urban Area
- Public and Commonwealth Land
- Rail Line
- State Significant Road Corridor

Note: This map does not depict the bulk water supply systems that can be used under some circumstances to support agriculture



# G21 Agribusiness Economic Profile

Conceptual map of agribusiness in the G21 Region



**The Golden Plains Growth Strategy will need to:**

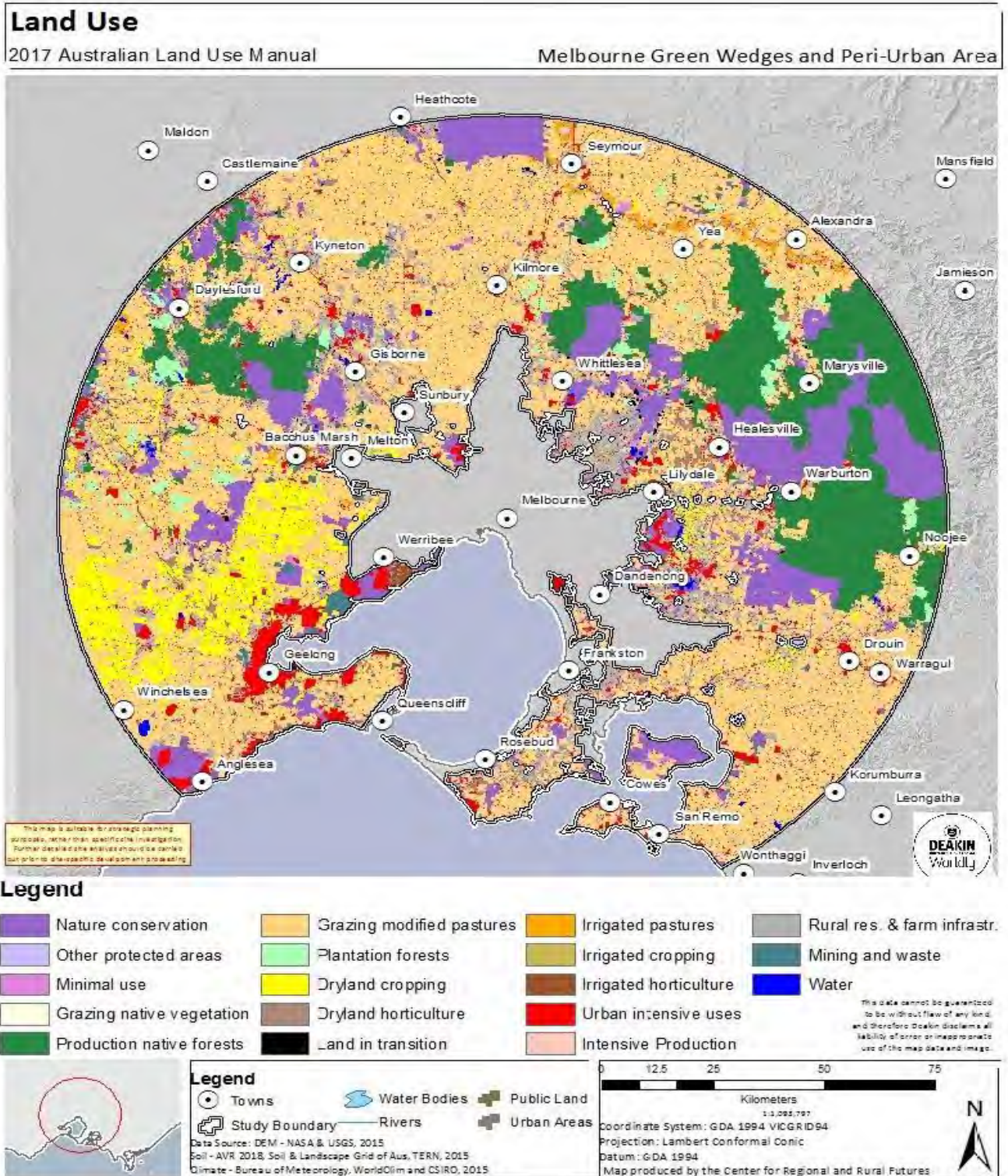
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- Provide certainty that these areas will continue as key agricultural areas into the future.
- Protect areas of significant water infrastructure investment
- Limit non-farming and incompatible uses that would restrict ongoing productive use of land for agricultural purposes.
- Protect buffers of identified areas from encouraging sensitive uses such as dwellings to ensure agricultural activities continue without restrictions

*In planning for the growth of Golden Plains Shire it is important to safeguard food-producing areas and plan for future agricultural needs.*



# Agricultural Land Classes and soil types in Golden Plains Shire

These figures depict the land uses in the Peri-urban areas of Melbourne as provided in the *Assessment of Agricultural Land Capability in Melbourne's Green Wedge and Peri-urban Areas*, Agriculture Victoria Research Final Technical Report, October 2018













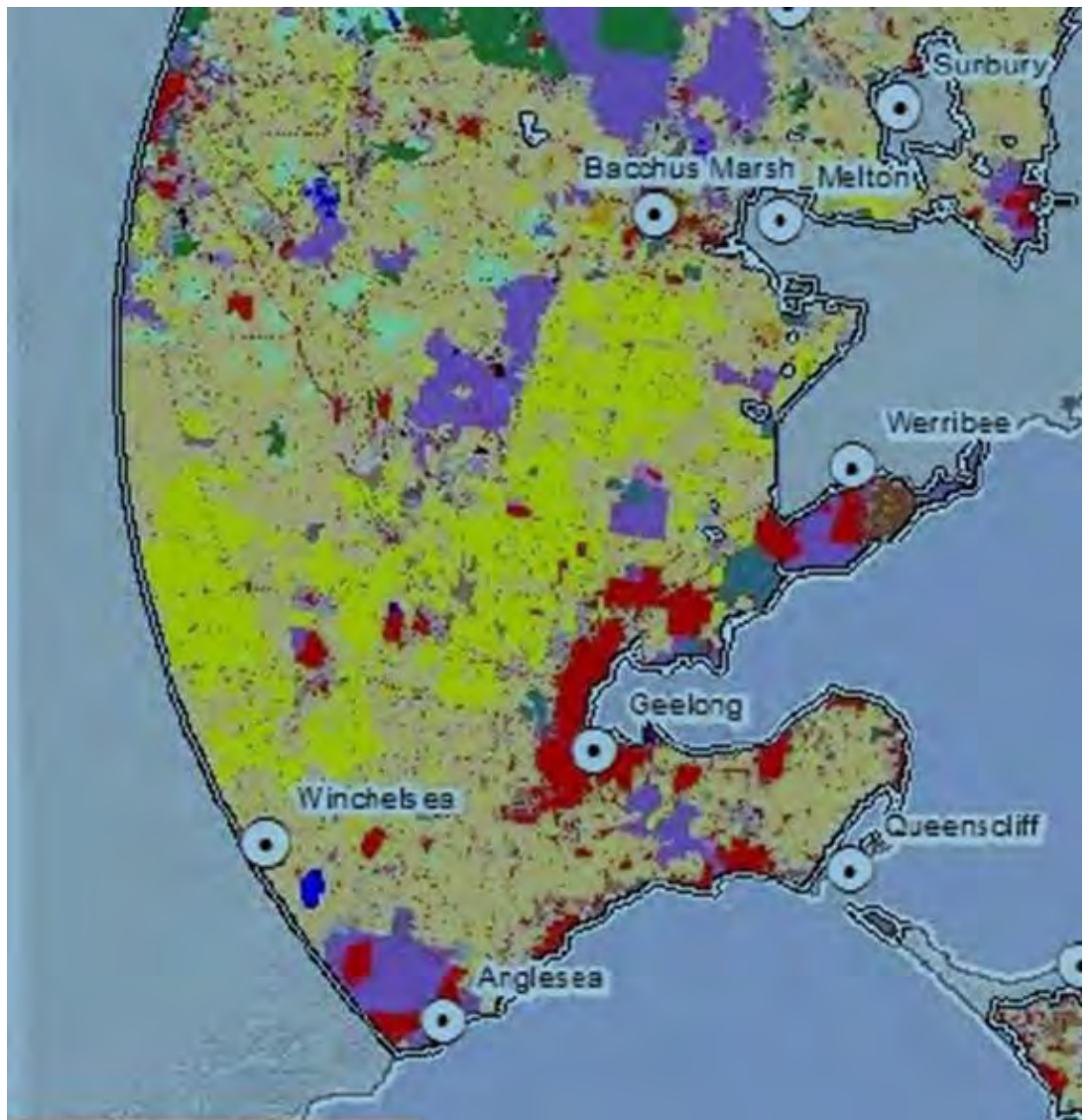
Land in the Golden Plains region is largely in production from dryland agriculture.

Golden Plains Shire contains Volcanic Plains. Many of the soils, developed on basalt are texture contrast with variable amounts of rock and depth to bedrock. Where much of the land has not been cleared of stone, the soils are used for sheep and cattle grazing on unimproved pastures. Less stony areas (including those that haven 'stone picked') have been cropped on a rotational basis with grazing.

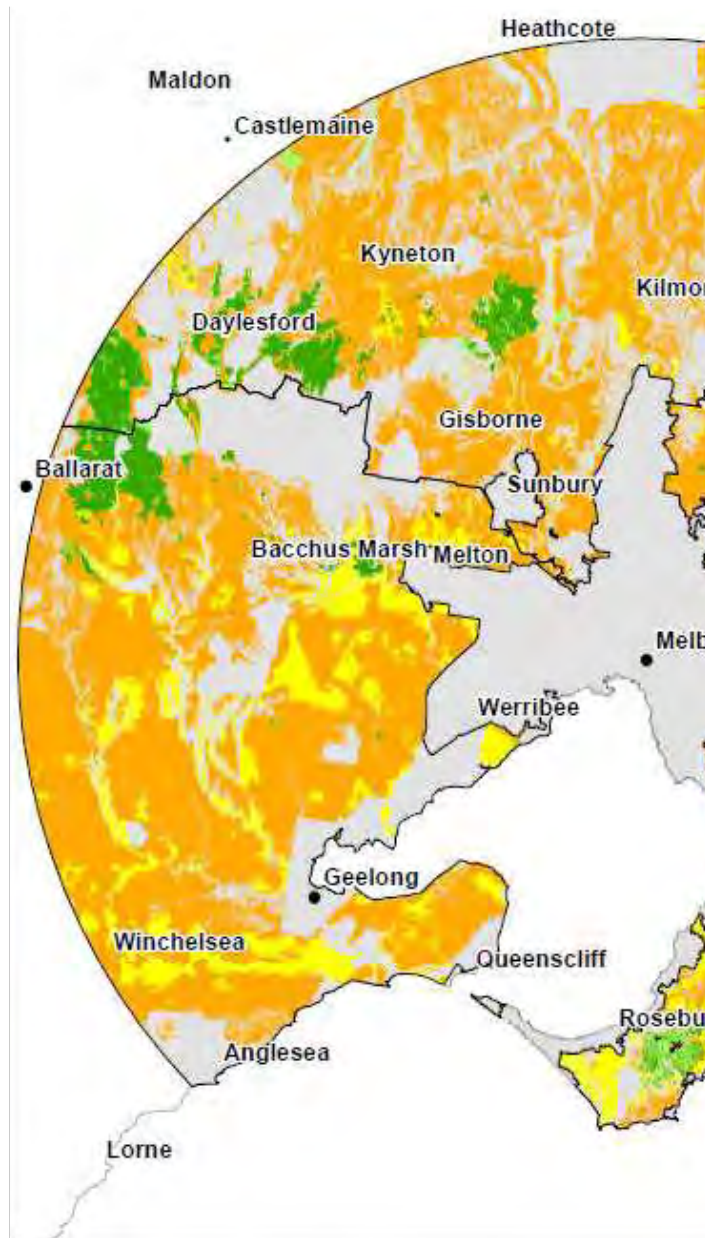
General cropping (mainly cereals) occurs in the south-western per-urban area around Inverleigh.

#### Legend

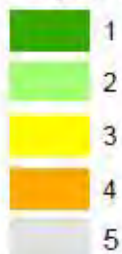
 Nature conservation	 Grazing modified pastures
 Other protected areas	 Plantation forests
 Minimal use	 Dryland cropping
 Grazing native vegetation	 Dryland horticulture
 Production native forests	 Land in transition



## Agricultural Classes in Golden Plains Shire



### Capability Class



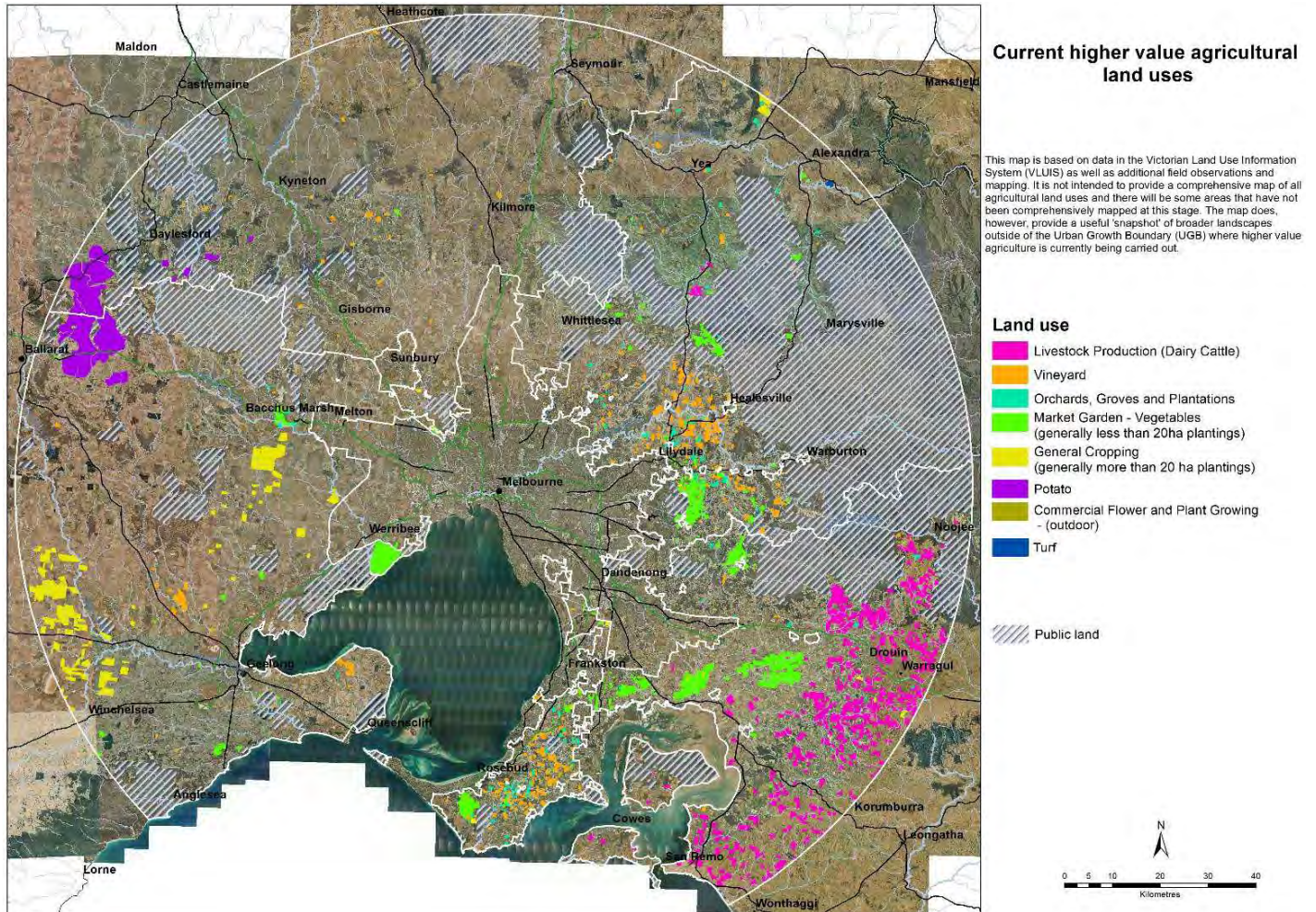
Note: Land capability landscape mapping across the study area based on existing information. Finer-scale assessment and landscape should be developed taking into account local conditions.

The majority of the Golden Plains region, inside the 100km radius of Melbourne, is classified as Class 4 with some areas of Class 3. There are no areas of classes 1 and 2 which are regarded as the most highly valuable agricultural land.

**Class 3.** Land that is inherently capable for soil based agriculture at moderate to high intensity. The potential/ capability may vary (e.g. according to slope, inherent fertility and drainage), but is often realized with access to a constant water supply. Many landscapes with deeper sandy soils are represented here - which are highly suited to horticulture once land-forming, drainage, fertilisers and irrigation is provided. Suitable landscapes with more favourable texture-contrast soils (e.g. deeper surface horizons, relatively friable and stable upper subsoils) are also included. Land management limitations are slight to moderate for intensive use.

**Class 4** is defined as land that is not as inherently capable for intensive soil-based agriculture. Extensive agriculture (including broadacre cropping with suitable land management practices) and non-soil utilization activities are often most appropriate, and more intensive grazing is possible in some high rainfall areas where consistent water supplies are available. Due to mapping resolution, some minor exclusion areas, (ie. Class 5) can be present where land attributes (e.g. slope) vary locally. Land management limitations are high to very high for intensive use. There are also likely to be some areas of land within this Class that may have higher capability (e.g. suitable terrain with soils that have deep sandy surface horizons), but that are not able to be identified at this stage due to the broad scale of soil/ landscape mapping available across much of the study area.

*Assessment of Agricultural Land Capability in Melbourne's Green Wedge and Peri-urban Areas, Agriculture Victoria Research Final Technical Report, October 2018*



*Potential areas can become capable with increasing management intervention and infrastructure (e.g. drainage, addition of organic matter). Water supply is also crucial for intensive uses, either natural or artificial to convert 'potential' to 'suitable'.*

### Land suitability per commodity

The Centre for Regional and Rural Futures in association with Deakin University undertook a *Land Suitability Assessment in Melbourne's Green Wedge and Peri-Urban Areas, 2018* and modelled forecast changes to the climate, including increased temperatures, reduced rainfall, drought, flooding and extreme heat events, which are expected to impact agriculture.

The **Canola** model indicates that a significant proportion of the region is suitable for canola production now and will remain so out to 2070 - there is however limited soil data to verify this for the Golden Plains region.

The **Cool Climate Grape** model output indicates that suitability in the region will decline out to 2070.

**Pome Fruit** suitability declines markedly, primarily due to chill accumulation.

By contrast, **Early Season Stone Fruit** improves over time - but mostly for the south eastern region of the Melbourne peri-urban study area.

**Lucerne** suitability is moderate to low and this is unlikely to change as climate changes.

**Perennial Ryegrass** shows only moderate decline with projected climate scenarios and is identified as being of low to moderate suitability in the Golden Plains region.

The suitability of **Vegetables** in the region will improve out to 2070. There is limited soil input data available for the Golden Plains region and therefore there is little information on the suitability of this crop for this particular area.

*Land Suitability Assessment in Melbourne's Green Wedge and Peri-Urban Areas, Centre for Regional and Rural Futures, Deakin University, 2018*

## Soil types

A *Land Resource Assessment of the Corangamite Region*, by Primary Industries Research Victoria, 2003 identified some of the following soil types across the Golden Plains region:

Note: **Dark green** indicating dominating in these areas, **light green** indicating a minor soil growth in these areas.

**No. 15** Yellow and brown strongly acidic mottled texture contrast soils on Neogene sediments. Texture contrast and strongly acidic mottled subsoil, limiting nutrient availability.



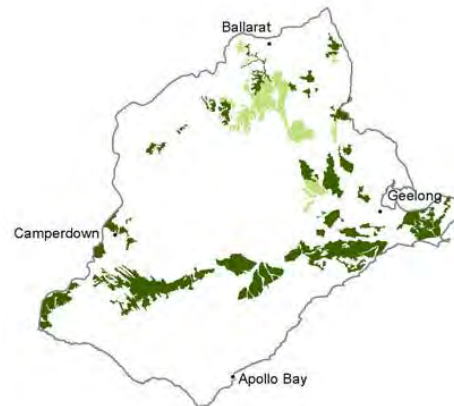
**No. 25** Yellow and brown strongly acidic mottled texture contrast and gradational (earth) soils on Palaeozoic sediments. High silt content, erosion prone, strongly acidic and low nutrient availability



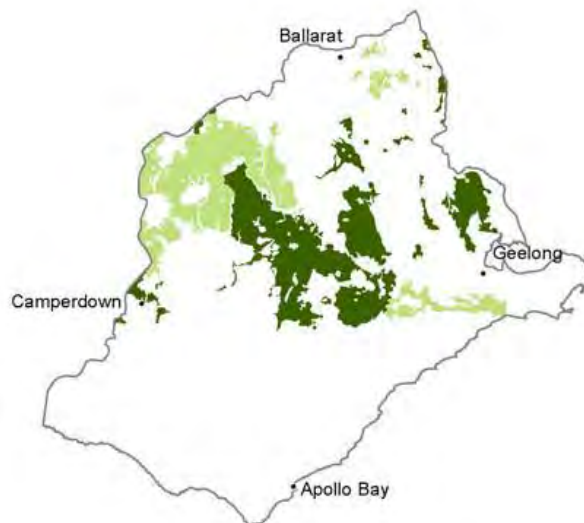
**No. 26** Yellow and brown sodic and strongly sodic mottled texture contrast soils on Palaeozoic sediments. High silt content, erosion prone, acidic and low nutrient availability



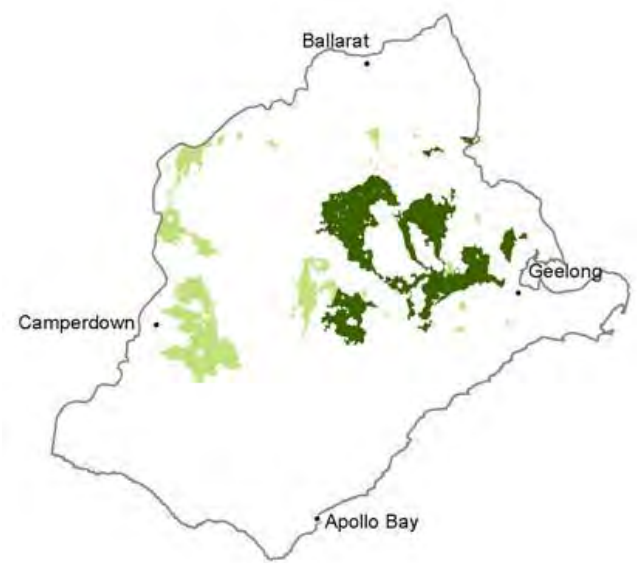
**No.13** Grey and brown (occasionally black, yellow or red) mottled texture contrast soils on Neogene sediments. Presence of buckshot sitting on top of the subsoil, sandy nature of the upper soil, red and pale mottling of the subsoil



**No. 35** Black and grey strongly sodic texture contrast soils on Quaternary basic volcanics. Notable features including texture contrast, coarse structure (columnar), very hard when dry, strong sodicity in the subsoil and possibly the surface soil, variable vertical depth and horizontal distance characteristics of surface soil, free carbonate (calcareous) at depth, deep profiles and some ferromanganiferous gravel.



**No. 39** Black, grey, brown and red cracking calcareous clays on Quaternary basic volcanics. Notable characteristics include: high shrink-swell potential, strong structure, self-mulching surfaces, high organic matter content in upper soil, some mottling at depth, high clay content throughout, and calcareous (carbonate) at depth.





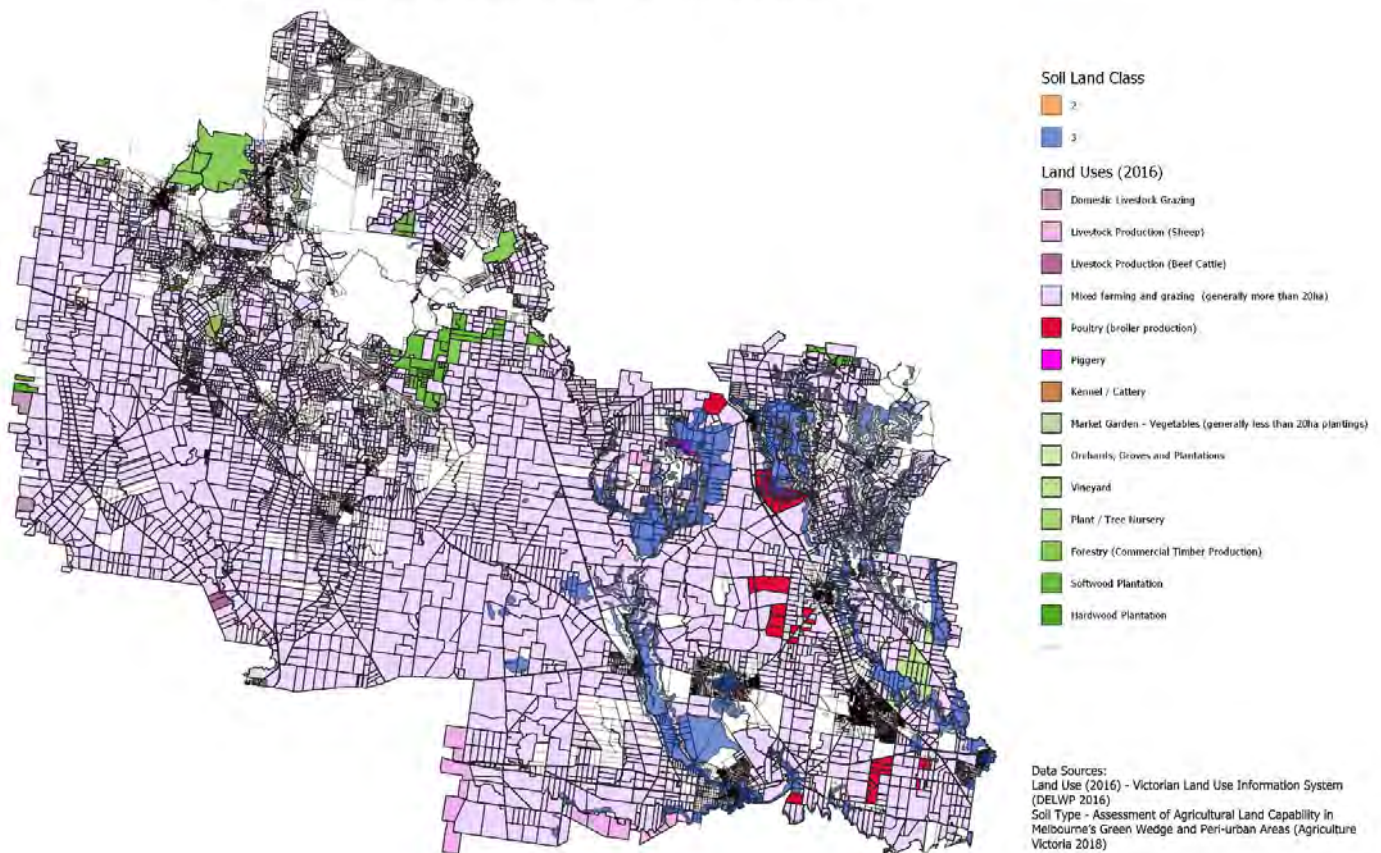
## Spatial identification of Agricultural uses in Golden Plains

Agricultural land uses across Golden Plains Shire, provided by Agriculture Victoria

From the Interactive Resource Map at: <https://invest.agriculture.vic.gov.au/>

The interactive map identifies the location of agricultural land uses across Victoria. Here are some snips from across Golden Plains Shire.

Agricultural Land Uses and Soil Class in GPS



## Directions for agriculture in Golden Plains

The Golden Plains Growth Strategy will identify areas suitable for a range of land uses include housing growth, industrial land supply and areas suitable for agriculture. Balancing the future population needs of the Shire whilst protecting and nurturing its natural, cultural and historical resources in a period of climate change and population growth will be managed using strategic rationale, articulated into actions, policy and legislation.

Council policies, derived from the Council Plan and principles from the Community Vision 2040 set the foundations for providing the framework to support land use decisions. Strategies including the Economic Development Strategy, Rural Land Use Strategy and the preparation of the Golden Plains Growth Strategy provide the framework for guiding the future land use across the Shire. These are then sanctioned through the Planning Scheme using zones, overlays, policies and maps.

The following strategies outline the directions for agriculture which the Growth Strategy and Planning Scheme will need to implement.

### Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, 2017-2022

The main driver of economic activity in Golden Plains Shire is the agricultural sector; employing 26% of the shire's workforce and worth \$159 million in economic output or 20% of the Shire's economy ([REMPLAN 2016](#)).

#### Broad acre

In broad acre farming in the region, there has been a shift from livestock toward grain production driven by seasonal changes

(climate change) and commodity prices. The trend of lower rainfall in addition to high demand for grain forecast that this trend will continue.

56,000 hectares, or 30% of land in Golden Plains Shire is used primarily for cropping, with 242 of the Shire's agricultural enterprises (approximately 50%) involved in predominantly the production of barley, wheat and canola.

#### Intensive

Intensive agriculture includes piggeries, chicken broiler farms, egg farms, free range egg farms and free range poultry.

The 2013-2017 Economic Development Strategy identified barriers to intensive agricultural development and to some extent they continue to be issues for the agricultural industry in Golden Plains Shire. These barriers include limited water infrastructure in some parts of the Shire, the absence of a local feed mill and limited land availability due to buffer zones.

The identification of the Food Production Precinct in Clause 14.01-2L of the Planning Scheme and provision of water supply to the Precinct provides strong support for intensive animal industries and assists within addressing some of the significant barriers which previously existed.

### Key take aways from 2017-2022 Strategy

Protect existing agricultural uses and their surrounding land to ensure biosecurity and amenity buffers.

Support establishment of agricultural processing facilities and/or a feed mill within or close to the Food Production Precinct or the Gheringhap Employment Precinct.

### **Draft Economic Development, Tourism and Investment Attraction (EDTIA) Strategy 2022-2032**

The agriculture sector has driven the Golden Plains Shire economy for decades. A key asset for the Shire is its supply of land, which can be leveraged for economic development, whether agriculture, tourism or energy generation.

The Shire has 19,000ha of land designated National Park and State Forest and 120ha is in Council reserves for passive recreation. Much of the remaining land spanning across an area of approximately 2,700 square metres, is cleared agricultural land, used for broadacre cropping and livestock grazing.

Agriculture accounts for 25% of output and 20% of employment within the Shire.

There is strong growth in intensive agriculture, particularly poultry, pigs, beef and goat dairy.

There are opportunities to increase the productivity of agricultural land through new technology, biosecurity measures, new crops, water management and farming techniques, plus non-agricultural uses like carbon farming and renewable energy.

For a rural area like Golden Plains where agriculture has historically been the dominant sector, value-adding initiatives and diversification are important.

The economy of Golden Plains is currently driven by specialisations in agriculture (including food product manufacturing) and by population growth.

While the economy's structure is grounded in primary production, it is important that planning for the next phase creates

opportunities to build on these and encourage new enterprises into the economy.

The new Strategy to 2032 aims to guide economic development so Golden Plains Shire has a productive and exciting decade, with development that meets the Vision 2040.

Economic development must therefore focus on the importance of place, community connection and support, be inclusive, ready to take advantage of new ideas and opportunities, be clean and green, localise spending, wealth and opportunity, build partnerships, and encourage entrepreneurship and innovation.

#### **Four focus areas are identified in the Strategy to 2032:**

1. Small Towns and Enterprise, supporting the towns and business
2. Productive, Sustainable Landscapes, value-adding processing and increasing sustainable agriculture output, supporting low-carbon, circular economy opportunities.
3. Escape the City, supporting tourism
4. Shire-Based Health and Education, attracting investment in health and education to support the growing population and create local jobs.

Productive, Sustainable Landscapes

**FOCUS AREA TWO: PRODUCTIVE, SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPES**



**Horizon 1: Consolidate**  
Golden Plains Shire is a region of natural landscapes and parklands, small towns and villages with a strong food and fibre sector.

- Increase and protect the productivity of agriculture to generate sources of income from local assets into the future (land, soil, water, energy, etc.).
- Build awareness of implications and opportunities of a low carbon, circular economy.

**Horizon 2: Enhance**  
Golden Plains Shire attracts new sustainable businesses and implements agricultural practices to transition to a low carbon, circular 'green' economy amongst increasingly rehabilitated landscapes.

- Leverage mitigation and adaptation to create local employment opportunities (e.g. retrofitting buildings).
- Implement circular economy, carbon reduction and regenerative methods in production.
- Facilitate expansion and innovation in the food sector and support 'food entrepreneurship'.
- Develop a reputation as a Shire leading in clean energy investment and production and land restoration.

**Horizon 3: Transform**  
Golden Plains Shire exports renewable energy and high-quality food and fibre products, generating income and employment through industries that are diverse, regenerative, innovative and climate-adaptive.

**Existing Projects**  
Delivery of the following ongoing/upcoming projects and initiatives can help catalyse progress in this focus area:

- The Golden Plains Food Production Precinct
- Golden Plains Wind Farm (WestWind Energy)
- Barwon Water Regional Renewable Organics Network at Black Rock
- Sustainability Victoria grants and funding
- Investigation into electric vehicle charging points across the Shire

**Partners for Delivery**

- Victorian and Australian Government: Agriculture Victoria, Global Victoria, Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Sustainability Victoria, etc.
- Traditional Owner groups
- Golden Plains Farmers' Market stall holders, local producers, restaurants
- Regional authorities and bodies: Barwon Water, G21, etc.
- WestWind Energy
- Golden Plains Food Production Precinct Investment Taskforce

Economic Development, Tourism & Investment Attraction Strategy 2022-2032 | Golden Plains Shire Council 13

**1.2 ACTION PLAN**  
FOCUS AREA TWO: PRODUCTIVE, SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPES

Strategy	Council action	Council role	Department(s) responsible	Partners	Timeframe
<b>Increase and protect the productivity of agriculture to generate sources of income from local assets into the future (land, soil, water, energy, etc.)</b>	As part of the Golden Plains Settlement Strategy project, review and update the directions of the 2008 Rural Land Use Strategy to ensure the environment and economy of agricultural/natural lands are protected.	Provider/ Stat. Authority	Economic Development, Planning, Environment		S
	Ensure waterways are protected through land use planning processes (including the Golden Plains Settlement Strategy project) and infrastructure delivery, and water sensitive urban design (WSUD) projects.	Provider/ Facilitator/ Stat. Authority	Economic Development, Planning, Environment		Ongoing
	Support the implementation of the Invasive Species Program to reduce the potential of these invasive species to negatively impact agricultural production.	Provider/ Facilitator	Economic Development, Environment		Ongoing
	Engage with industry leaders to explore productivity boosting opportunities and position the Shire as leaders in sustainable, high value agriculture practices.	Facilitator	Economic Development	Agriculture industry leaders	Ongoing

<b>Build awareness of implications and opportunities of a low-carbon, circular economy.</b>	Investigate opportunities for circular economy process for local economic and industry benefit.	Provider/ Facilitator	Economic Development, Environment	Sustainability Victoria	S
	Educate Council staff and other key stakeholders on the economic and environmental benefits of a low-carbon, circular economy.	Provider/ Facilitator	Economic Development, Environment		S

Strategy	Council action	Council role	Department(s) responsible	Partners	Timeframe
<b>Leverage mitigation and adaptation to support businesses to be more energy efficient and create local employment opportunities (for example, retrofitting buildings).</b>	Review Council's procurement policies to support businesses with aligned environmental sustainability aspirations.	Provider/ Facilitator	Economic Development, Environment		M
	Implement an Environmental Upgrade Financing Scheme to enable business to undertake upgrades to improve the performance of their buildings.	Provider/ Facilitator	Economic Development, Environment	Sustainability Victoria	M
	Establish an environmental scorecard for business to assess their performance and incentivise those that adopt sustainable practices and technologies.	Provider/ Facilitator	Economic Development, Environment	Sustainability Victoria	M
	Promote the availability of relevant Sustainability Victoria grants and funding (for example, Victorian Energy Upgrades, Solar for Business Program).	Facilitator	Economic Development	Sustainability Victoria	Ongoing
<b>Implement circular economy, carbon reduction and regenerative methods in production.</b>	Incentivise businesses that adopt circular economy practices.	Provider/ Facilitator	Economic Development		Ongoing
	Engage with Traditional Owner groups to identify opportunities for regenerative farming practices.	Facilitator/ Advocate	Economic Development	Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation,	S
	Provide advice to landowners and neighbours of windfarms on how to invest financial incentives from windfarm projects to boost production and regeneration.	Provider/ Facilitator	Economic Development	Wind energy companies	Ongoing
	Encourage participation in the Barwon Water Regional Renewable Organics Network (pending delivery of the facility at Black Rock).	Facilitator	Economic Development	Barwon Water	Ongoing

Strategy	Council action	Council role	Department(s) responsible	Partners	Timeframe
<b>Facilitate expansion and innovation in the food sector and support 'food entrepreneurship'.</b>	Identify complementary secondary production/sub-sector opportunities (for example, expansion of viticulture in the Moorabool Valley) in partnership with Agriculture Victoria, G21 and local sector leaders.	Facilitator	Economic Development	G21, State Government, industry leaders	S
	Building on the business register, foster partnership and entrepreneurship between local businesses to increase direct-to-consumer opportunities in the food sector (for example, farmgate and farm-to-table).	Facilitator	Economic Development		Ongoing
	Collaborate with potential Golden Plains Food Production Precinct via the Investment Taskforce to guide its development as an innovative intensive farming precinct and ensure a strong local supply chain is in place from its establishment.	Facilitator	Economic Development	Golden Plains Food Production Precinct Investment Taskforce	Ongoing
<b>Develop a reputation as a Shire leading in clean energy investment and production.</b>	Expand the Golden Plains Farmers' Market to include additional local vendors at the new Bannockburn Heart Precinct site and build on the market program (for example, additional Twilight Market sessions).	Provider/ Facilitator	Economic Development	Market stall holders, organisers	Ongoing
	Leverage the delivery of the WestWind wind farm in a campaign that positions the Shire as an emerging hub for clean energy investment.	Facilitator	Economic Development, Communications & Engagement		M
	Include climate leadership as a parameter for investment attraction efforts.	Facilitator	Economic Development		S

*Draft Economic Development, Tourism and Investment Attraction Strategy 2022-2032*

## Golden Plains Rural Land Use Strategy, 2008

### Review

The Rural Land Use Strategy was prepared to guide planning for future land use and development in the rural areas of Golden Plains Shire, following the introduction of new rural zones by the State Government.

At the time preparing the Rural Land Use Strategy, the settlement hierarchy of the Shire was defined by the provision of sewerage for Bannockburn and the listing of Smythesdale as a priority town for sewerage. The preparation of structure plans for a series of towns across the Shire and provision for rural living and rural residential development reinforced the overall land use pattern.

In essence the residential land use pattern comprised four core elements:

1. Priority towns for Infrastructure provision. Bannockburn, Smythesdale and Rokewood.
2. Encouraging township residential growth where there was provision of key social, community and commercial facilities in those towns.
3. Rural residential and rural living development in designated Rural Living Zones and Low Density Residential Zones.
4. Dispersed dwellings only in rural areas where the resident was undertaking commercial farming activities.

Since 2008, the Victoria Bushfires Royal Commission has been a catalyst for change in the consideration of the suitability of rural residential and low density residential patterns of development.

The spaciousness of allotments and large setbacks of dwellings results in producing high fuel loads from extensive well-intentioned plantings and landscaping of residential allotments that subsequently create a bushfire risk to themselves, their neighbours and overall townships.

The recent *Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment* prepared for Golden Plains has highlighted this style of development creates its own bushfire risk and increases the risk to adjoining township areas.

*As a consequence, the rural residential and rural living development pattern is no longer an appropriate residential product in the bushfire risk landscape of Golden Plains Shire.*

The *Golden Plains Biodiversity Strategy 2016* also provides the groundwork for considering a review of the application of the Rural Conservation Zone to areas identified as having biodiversity value.

The *Biodiversity Strategy* identifies priority areas for biodiversity conservation, specifically the Strategy identifies Focal Areas that are strategic for biodiversity conservation and are predicted to have a favourable future climate. There are also Strategic Areas predicted to have high strategic value for biodiversity but an adverse future climate. The Strategy recommends 'Environmental Zones' around Focal Areas and Strategic Areas for biodiversity conservation. The objective would be to reduce threats to biodiversity, such as clearance for subdivision and urbanisation. Land use intensity should also be reduced in these areas.

The Strategy also recommends establishing Vegetation Protection Areas for areas that contain significant vegetation or provide important habitat corridors for native fauna. Similarly the *Golden Plains Environment Strategy 2019-2027* has directions which go beyond the actions identified in the Rural Land Use Strategy, 2008, including:

- Holistically manage landscape functions to produce Golden Plains Shire's food, fuel and fibre.
- Support, encourage and promote environmentally sustainable agriculture models and businesses in the Shire.

A Comparative Analysis of the Rural Land Use Strategy, 2008 against Council's current vision and strategies has been undertaken and is provided as an Attachment.

While many of the objectives remain relevant, providing for planned rural residential development and rural living development is not a specific strategy in the Council Plan, Community Vision or draft Economic Development, Tourism and Investment Strategy.

Similarly, many of the specific actions of the Rural Land Use Strategy, 2008 remain relevant and ongoing, some are completed and some are no longer applicable or relevant in light of the recent strategies, policies and assessments including the Shirewide Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment and the draft Economic Development Tourism Investment Assessment.

## Identifying suitable areas for Agriculture into the future

The following information was provided by the Agriculture Victoria Planning and Advisory Service, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

### *Identification of valuable*

*agricultural land should go beyond soil values.*

For new and/or expanding farming enterprises, many do not require highly productive soils but critically need available **land** which provides for environmental **buffers** and **separation distances** regards (to) **amenity** and **biosecurity**.

Reliance on defining the quality of agricultural land based on soils only, has a limiting effect on the recognition of what is productive agricultural land. Recent VCAT decision provide guidance on this debate, including *Estate of JE Walker v Wangaratta RCC* [2021] VCAT 125.

Pig farms, poultry farms and intensive animal production, including intensive dairy farms represent a high level of investment which are not soil based and contribute to a large extent to the State's net agricultural production.

In addition there is the need for strategic tools that provide surety for investment to protect agricultural land uses in appropriate zones against encroachment from sensitive uses including dwellings.

Access to processing facilities and supply chains is also a critical factor in agricultural land use investment in many instances either through value adding on farm and or proximity to larger scale processing facilities.

Current practice is that poultry growers must be within 200 km of a processing facility. Baiada, closed the Laverton North processing facility and ceased operations in Victoria in 2017, whilst continuing to expand its operations in every mainland state (except Victoria). The decision affected a number of contracted poultry growers and has led to a diversification of some businesses. This has highlighted a policy gap at state level as there is no guidance for 'other' poultry.

Advocating for effective policy guidance may provide drivers for investment and or expansion of the 'other' poultry sector. These activities are not apparent or represented in the Green Wedges Agricultural Land higher value agricultural land use analysis but are likely to be applicable to Golden Plains Shire.

Urban pressures on agricultural land may extend beyond the 100km radius of metropolitan Melbourne to 150km or a two (2) hour commute if emergent COVID demographic data continues to show a decrease in Melbourne's population and an increase within the 150km radius.

*Emails dated Friday 22 July, 2022 and Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2022 from AGVic Planning (DJPR) to Golden Plains Shire*

## Identifying suitable areas in Golden Plains for agriculture into the future

The agriculture sector has driven the Golden Plains Shire economy for decades. A key asset for the Shire is its supply of land, which can be leveraged for economic development, whether agriculture, tourism or energy generation.

The Shire has 19,000ha of land designated National Park and State Forest and 120ha is in Council reserves for passive recreation. Much of the remaining land spanning across an area of approximately 2,700 square metres, is cleared agricultural land, used for broadacre cropping and livestock grazing.

In planning for growth, agricultural land is needed as a long term reliable local food source and its also needed for consumption by a growing population for residential purposes. The purpose of this assessment is to identify the agricultural areas which should be protected for meeting the food consumption needs of a growing population and which areas can be relinquished for residential growth.

The Assessment has reviewed the state and local policy in the planning scheme, past and present strategic work, relevant studies, relevant recommendations of planning panels and the recommendations of the recent planning scheme review.

The vision and strategic directions for agricultural land in the shire derive from the *Community Vision 2040*, the *Council Plan 2021-2025* and the draft *Economic Development, Tourism and Investment Strategy, 2022-2023*

Determining the spatial strategic direction for rural areas is the next stage and will be undertaken by layering:

- The physical attributes of the land and its capacity to support **productive** agricultural uses including soil type, climate, vegetation cover, access to water, slope and drainage.
- Areas already identified for strategic rural use with associated infrastructure i.e Food Production Precinct.
- The natural resources and environmental features of the area and their importance including biodiversity, wetlands, scenic landscapes and sites of archaeological or cultural significance.
- Environmental hazards that could affect how land is used and developed such as erosion, salinity, flooding and bushfire risk.
- The existing lot size and land use patterns
- Infrastructure available for agriculture and other relevant land uses.
- The housing needs of the municipality.
- Settlement patterns of the area.

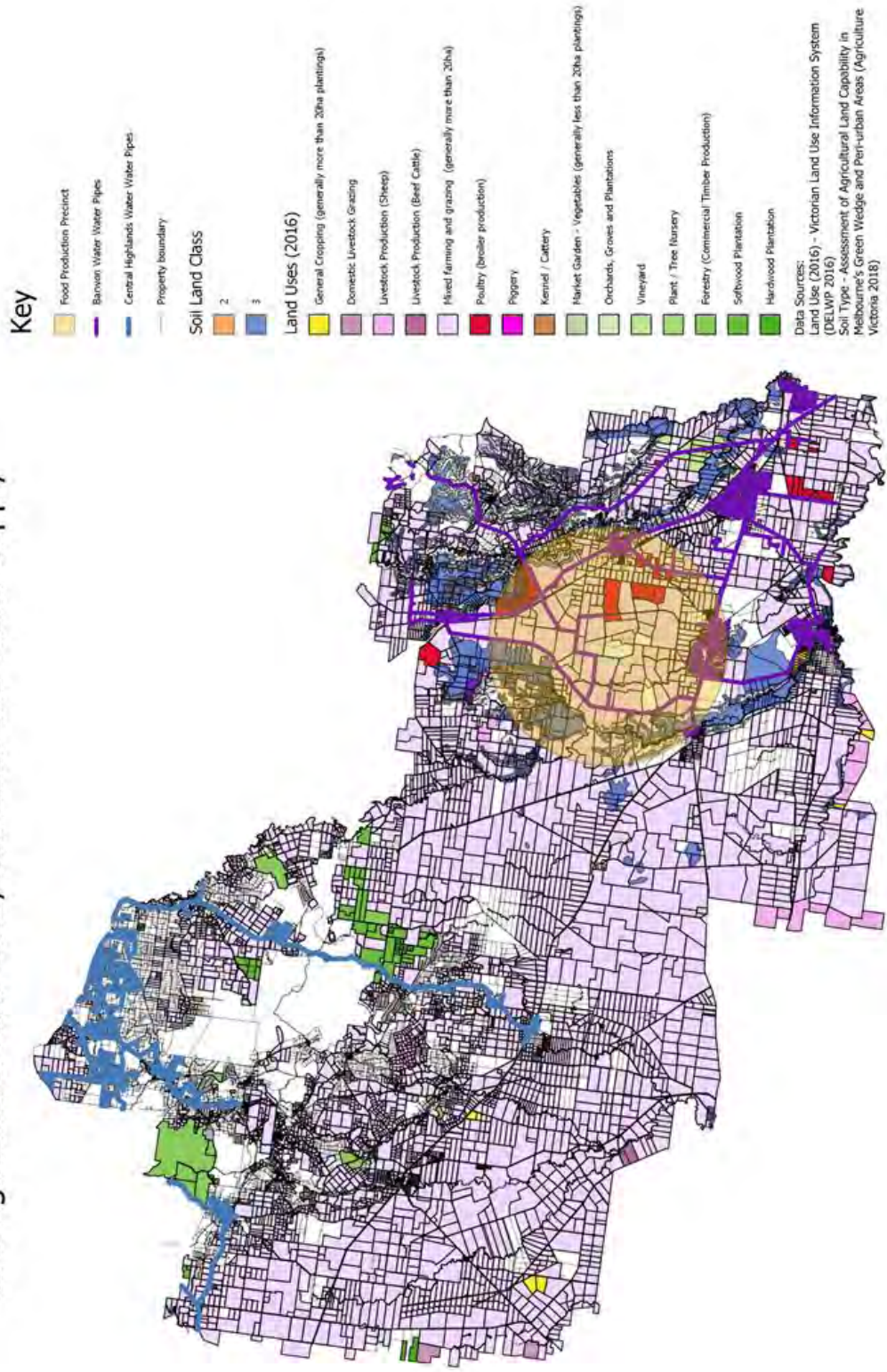
The following map identifies the current and predicted agricultural circumstances within Golden Plains Shire to assist in planning for the challenges of balancing future urban growth with food, fibre and resource production to support a growing population.

This map will inform the Growing Places Strategy.



Golden Plains Agriculture Map

GPS Agricultural Land Uses, Soil Class and Water Supply



## Attachment A – Review of the Rural Land Use Strategy, 2008

Table of Comparative Analysis of the Rural Land Use Strategy, 2008 against Council's current vision and strategies:

Objectives of the Rural Land Use Strategy 2008	Compatibility to Vision 2040 and draft EDTIA
Support and promote productive agriculture and rural enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote and improve the regional economy through partnerships, innovation and support for local producers, agriculture and businesses.</li> <li>Increase and protect the productivity of agriculture to generate sources of income from local assets into the future (land, soil, water, energy, etc.)</li> </ul>
Provide for planned rural residential and rural living development where it supports the existing settlement structure, does not impact on productive agricultural land uses and provides for enhanced environmental outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A diversity of quality rural and urban living alternatives that balances growth and retains a strong country feel.</li> </ul>
Strengthen the economic, social and community wellbeing of the Shire's towns and settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop distinct economic visions for the Shire's townships.</li> <li>Strengthen the network of services and infrastructure, including public transport, to connect people and support economic activity</li> <li>Develop local education opportunities at all life stages</li> <li>Develop the local health care sector through</li> </ul>

	<p>investment in infrastructure and partnerships with service providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to a range of employment opportunities and pathways</li> <li>Access to quality care, education and training</li> </ul>
Provide for value adding rural industries, including intensive animal industries where they can be sited so as to avoid conflicts and impacts on towns and settlements, residential uses, other agricultural uses and identified environmental values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate expansion and innovation in the food sector and support 'food entrepreneurship'</li> <li>Implement circular economy, carbon reduction and regenerative methods in production</li> <li>Support businesses to be more energy efficient and create local employment opportunities</li> </ul>
Work with landowners, community groups and relevant agencies to improve the natural resource base, the water quality and quantity in rivers and streams and the protection of the shire's environmental assets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure waterways are protected through land use planning processes (including the Golden Plains Settlement Strategy project) and infrastructure delivery, and water sensitive urban design (WSUD) project</li> <li>Embrace clean and green practices, including environmentally sustainable design, energy efficiency and green energy solutions.</li> </ul>
Strengthen the rural tourism economy by encouraging uses and development that support the Shire's tourist product without compromising the landscape and environmental values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance and develop the Golden Plains brand by fostering tourism industry entrepreneurs.</li> <li>Develop public tourist infrastructure (both physical and digital) to enable a high-quality visitor experience.</li> </ul>
Maintain the quality of the Shire's rural landscapes and the non-urban breaks between towns and settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure our environment and natural assets are maintained for future generations.</li> <li>Preserve our natural ecosystems, landscapes, features, open spaces, bushland and connection to cultural heritage.</li> </ul>

Note: Providing for planned rural residential development and rural living development is not a specific strategy in the Council Plan, Community Vision or draft Economic Development, Tourism and Investment Strategy.



The Rural Land Use Strategy 2008 provided the following list of actions. Comments on their currency and relevance are provided below each action.

- Support and facilitate productive agricultural land use

Remains relevant

- Retain the highest quality agricultural land in productive agricultural use

The majority of Golden Plains agricultural soil quality is classified as Class 4 with some areas of Class 3. Any Class 2 and Class 3 areas should be protected for agricultural use into the future.

Compared with other regions, Golden Plains agricultural land is projected to be less severely affected by climate change, making the protection of agriculture areas even more important as reliance on its productivity is likely to increase as suitability

for agriculture declines in other parts of the state.

Identification of **valuable** agricultural land should go beyond soil values to ensure sufficient agricultural land is available for productivity into the future. Even the lowest soil rated land (Class 4) can be agriculturally productive.

Focus on 'productive agricultural' land aligns with Clause 14.01-1S

- Support and facilitate sustainable intensive animal industries that can be sited so as to minimise amenity impacts and contain their buffer requirements within their own development.

Remains relevant and is embedded in the planning scheme at Clause 14.01-2L which directs intensive animal industries to land within or close to the Golden Plains Food Production Precinct. Clause 14.01-2L could be expanded to include Pig farm, Poultry farm etc. (as these are not nested under intensive animal production, as per Clause 73.04-3).

- Protect and enhance the quality of the rural landscape and environmentally significant areas through the application of the relevant zone based on its stated purposes and through appropriate zoning and overlay provisions

Remains relevant and requires refinement of the application of zones and overlays as well as the provisions within the schedules and overlays to ensure they are fulfilling their purpose to enhance rural landscape and environmental significant qualities.

- Support the Shire's rural communities with a focus on Bannockburn,

Smythesdale and Rokewood as key towns in the Shire's settlement structure

Review the key towns for focusing support for rural communities based on the documents informing the Growth Strategy. Consider Meredith as a key town to host agriculture related enterprises.

- Encourage and support local employment and small business development across the Shire's small towns and rural areas consistent with zoning purposes

Remains relevant and is consistent with the Council Plan, the current Economic Strategy and the Draft Economic Development and Tourism Investment Attraction Strategy.

- Ensure that land uses and developments are sited and managed so as to ensure that they do not impact detrimentally on the quantity and quality of environmental flows in the Shire's streams and watercourses

Remains relevant. Review overlays and schedules to ensure they are fulfilling this action.

- Recognise and plan the Shire's rural areas on the basis of the provision of small towns and rural living in the north west, planned township development and retention of productive rural land uses in the south east and productive farming and agricultural land uses in the remaining areas of the Shire

Review this action in light of the Shire wide Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment and the implications for rural living in the north west as well as review of future growth scenarios for towns and remaining areas of the Shire.

- Provide for rural living as part of a planned settlement and residential strategy by supporting existing towns and rural settlements.

Review this action in light of the Shire wide Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment and future growth strategies for towns and remaining areas of the Shire. Provision of rural residential type development is inconsistent with sustainable growth, bushfire protection policy and the protection of agricultural areas for its importance in providing a reliable local food source for the state.

- Plan for the south east areas of the Shire consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Golden Plains South East Land Use Strategy

The Golden Plains South East Land Study will be replaced by the Golden Plains Growth Strategy and will no longer be relevant.

- Retain the Shire's major river valleys as important rural landscape features and productive agricultural areas

Remains relevant and requires review of local policies, zones, overlays and schedules to ensure they are fulfilling their purpose to retain these areas.

- Ensure that the Shire's rural areas are considered as locations that may be able to support significant land uses required by the regional economies based on Geelong and Ballarat.

Remains relevant.

- Support and facilitate tourist developments and enterprises that require rural locations and do not impact on productive agricultural land uses

Remains relevant

- Control development of lots that form part of old and inappropriate subdivisions in rural areas to avoid isolated and un-serviced development and rural land fragmentation.

Remains relevant. Review policies review in context to example provided by Clause 14.01-1L of the Baw Baw Planning Scheme to prevent residential development in rural areas where there is potential to compromise the ongoing use of rural land for agricultural purposes.

- Ensure that new land uses and developments in rural areas contribute to the achievement of catchment management strategies and enhanced environmental outcomes

Remains relevant and is consistent with current Council strategies and policies.

- Apply the Rural Activity Zone where the use of the zone is justified to support specific uses and development that require a rural setting and is consistent with ongoing agricultural and farming operations.

Remains relevant. Review areas of Rural Activity Zone in light of the Shire wide Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment.

- Apply the Rural Conservation Zone where the protection of the environmental assets is paramount.

Remains relevant. Review application of Rural Conservation Zone in light of the Biodiversity Strategy 2016 and the Biodiversity Assessment informing the Golden Plains Growth Strategy.

## References

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*Advice from Agriculture Victoria provided in emails dated Friday 22 July, 2022 and Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2022 from AGVic Planning (DJPR) to Golden Plains Shire*