

**AGRICULTURAL INTENSITY STANDARDS
FOR OPEN SPACE LAND (1-D-1)**

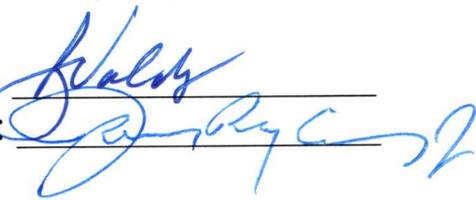
UVALDE COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT
ADOPTED JULY 1990

Revised November 11, 2021

Revised February 25, 2025

Chief Appraiser:

Board Chairman:

Handwritten signatures in blue ink over horizontal lines. The signature for the Chief Appraiser is 'Waldy' and the signature for the Board Chairman is 'Gary C. S. 2'.

INTENSITY STANDARDS FOR OPEN SPACE LANDS

Uvalde County

Revised 2025

In section 23.51 (1) of the Property Tax Code, “Qualified open space land...” is “...land that currently is *devoted primarily to agriculture* to the degree of intensity generally accepted in the area...” Intensity standards are derived from what is typical in the local area for the different agriculture operations. To help the local Appraisal Districts define these standards, the State Legislature provided for formation of an external advisory committee. To qualify, land must meet or exceed the minimum standards for Uvalde County outlined herein.

A. Operational Definitions

Only those operations that are truly commercial were considered in the definition of the intensity standards. The “*Manual for the Appraisal of Agricultural Land*” tasks the local Appraisal Districts with precluding the qualification of casual agricultural operations for Open Space Land Special Valuation.

There are three major categories of agricultural operations in Uvalde County: Cropland, Pastureland and Special Operations. These are further divided into the following subcategories (Table 1).

Table 1. Categorization of Agricultural Operations	
Uvalde County	
Cropland	
Row Crop (corn, grain sorghum, small grains, cotton, vegetables, melons, etc.)	
Hay (grass, small grains, legumes, etc.)	
Orchard/Grove (fruits, nuts)	
Truck Farm (fruits, vegetables)	
Vineyard (grapes)	
Pastureland	
Native Pasture (plants native to the county, varying degrees of brush encroachment)	
Introduced Forages (forages not native to the county; bermudagrass, bunchgrasses (kleingrass, bluestems, etc.), buffelgrass, fescue, legumes and others)	
Special Operations	
Feedlot	Floriculture
Swine (farrow or finish)	Christmas Trees
Bees/Honey	Turf Grass
Poultry	

B. Subcategories

The subcategories listed in Table 1 are further defined according to use. Environmental variations (topography, climate, altitude, soil type, plant community, etc.) preclude establishment of statewide intensity standards.

Animal Operations

Sustainable animal, meat, milk and/or animal fiber producing operations in Uvalde County are divided into two categories:

1. Grazing

- i. Grazing is defined as “animals (either domestic or wild) consuming forages (grasses, forbs and/or browse; actively growing or dormant) that are rooted in the soil.
- ii. Supplementation of such forages with hay, cubes, grain, blocks, tubs, liquid feeds, minerals or crop by-products during normal periods of forage dormancy or inadequate forage availability is typical for grazing operations in this area.
- iii. Pastures or fields with well-established browse lines on the trees and shrubs and exclusively bare ground will not qualify as grazing operations.
- iv. Grazing operations must have a perimeter fence suitable for the containment of the species involved. Electric fencing is not suitable for a permanent perimeter fence. A barbed wire (minimum four (4) strands) or net/woven wire fence at least 47 inches tall is suggested for cattle. A net or woven wire fence at least 47 inches tall is suggested for sheep and goats. Breeding horse operations should use fence materials safe for mares and foals.

2. Animal Feeding Operations

Animal Feeding Operations (AFO) are agricultural operations where animals are kept and raised in confined situations. AFOs congregate animals, feed, manure and urine and production operations on a small land area. Feed is brought to the animals rather than the animals grazing or otherwise obtaining sustenance from fields or pasture.

1. Grazing Operations

1a. Minimum acreage requirement for a livestock operation (either grazing or confinement fed) in Uvalde County are twenty (20) acres.

1b. Minimum acreage requirement for a wildlife:

- i. operation devoted to wildlife management (on split or standalone properties) in Uvalde County is 50 acres.**
- ii. operation as part of a wildlife management association in Uvalde County is 20.0 acres.**
- iii. operation devoted to wildlife management use for species of concern, whether candidate, threatened or endangered (on split or standalone properties) is 20.0 acres.**

Note: Above minimum acreage requirements for wildlife management qualification were adopted by the Uvalde County Appraisal District Board of Directors April 9, 2002, and published April 11, 2002.

Grazing operations may include one or more of the following:

- a. **Beef Cow/Calf** – Owning cattle for the purpose of producing and selling, feeder calves or breeding stock. Excess inventory or cull cows, heifers and bulls are also products of a cow/calf operation. A 1000 lb. cow and her calf are considered one animal unit (see Table 2).
- b. **Dairy** – Owning cattle for the purpose of producing and selling milk and/or milk products. Primary breeds include but are not limited to Holstein and Jersey. Most dairy cattle operations will qualify for open space land as a confinement fed operation. In the event they are truly a *grazing* operation, high quality forages must be available continuously. In Uvalde County irrigation is required. One dairy cow is an animal unit (see Table 2).
- c. **Stocker** – Owning immature livestock (calves, yearling cattle, lambs, kids) for the purpose of grazing and increasing body weight. Stockers are generally weaned animals that will be grazed for a period of time and then either 1) retained as replacement breeding animals; 2) moved to a confinement feeding operation for finishing to harvest weight or, 3) moved to other pasture for additional grazing. Stockers must be grazed for a minimum period of 120 days per year. See Table 2 for animal unit equivalents.
- d. **Ewe/Lamb** – Owning sheep for the purpose of producing and selling replacement breeding stock, lambs and/or wool. Excess inventory, cull ewes or rams are also products of a ewe/lamb operation. Five (5) ewes and their offspring equal one animal unit (see Table 2).
- e. **Doe/Kid** – Owning goats for the purpose of producing and selling replacement breeding stock, kids and/or mohair. Excess inventory, cull does or bucks are also products of a doe/kid operation. Five (5) does and their kids equal one animal unit (see Table 2).
- f. **Horses** – Owning brood mares for the purpose of raising foals; a horse breeding operation. To qualify as a grazing operation, sufficient pasture/forage must be available to sustain the horses most of the year. Supplemental feeding of mares and foals will likely be required. One horse is one animal unit equivalent (see Table 2). The grazing of horses for recreational use (rodeo, trail rides, leisure riding, draft) will **not** qualify a property for Open Space Lands.
Exception: Pasturing saddle or stock horses routinely used on a larger ranch property for livestock management can qualify a property for Open Space Lands.
- g. **Hoofstock** – Owning wildlife (native and/or non-native) for the purpose of producing and selling replacement breeding stock, hunting inventory, or animals to be harvested for meat. Minimum height of the net or woven wire perimeter fence must be at least seven

and one-half (7.50) feet. According to Table 2, seven (7) whitetail deer equal one animal unit.

Note: According to Part I of the state regulations for Qualifying Land for Wildlife Management Use, “Land must be used to generate a sustaining breeding, migrating, or wintering population of *indigenous* wild animals.”

Further,
 “An *indigenous* animal is a native animal that originated in or naturally migrates through and area and is naturally living in that area.”

Consequently, exotic hoofstock (example – Axis deer, Fallow deer, Sika deer, Elk, Blackbuck antelope, African plains species, and others) are not considered ‘wildlife’ for Open Space Land use purposes. These exotics can be used as livestock to qualify a property for Open Space Lands.

Intensively managed whitetail deer or exotic hoofstock breeding programs (example – animals continuously housed in high-fenced pens) are an Animal Feeding Operation.

<i>Type of Livestock or Wildlife</i>	<i>AUE</i>	<i>Number per AU</i>
Mature Cow, beef or dairy	1	1
Stocker calf (up to 750 lb)	0.5	2
Yearling (over 750 lb)	0.6	1.7
Bull	1	1
Rams & Ewes (sheep)	0.20	5
Bucks and Does (goats)	0.20	5
Mature horse	1	1
Whitetail Deer	0.14	7
Animal Unit is defined as the amount of forage required to sustain a 1,000 lb mature cow and her calf for one year (26 lbs of dry matter per day).		

Carrying Capacity - Carrying capacity is related to forage production potential and is expressed as number of acres required to support an animal unit on a yearlong (sustainable) basis. Carrying capacity is significantly influenced by the productivity of the soil. Soils (and hence their productivity) differ significantly across Uvalde County (see Table 3).

In general, the calcareous soils of the Eastern Edwards Plateau (northern portion of Uvalde County) have shallow soil depths and limited water holding capacities. Juniper infestation is frequent and often dense. Forage production by such range sites is limited. Sustainable stocking rates in this area may vary widely depending on range site, previous use and current range condition.

In contrast, forage production across range sites in the Northern Rio Grande Plain (southern portion of Uvalde County) is less variable (than described above for Edwards Plateau). Soils are generally deeper and have greater water holding capacity. Sustainable stocking rates are less variable than for northern Uvalde County. Sustainable stocking rates depend on range site, previous use and current range condition.

Introduced grass pasture – Regardless of location within Uvalde County, sustainable stocking rates for introduced grass pastures depend on quality of the grass stand and management (weed control, irrigation/soil moisture, fertilization, etc.).

NOTE: In the event the property size meets the minimum acreage criterion (as previously outlined herein) but lacks forage production to sustainably support the respective animal inventory shown in Table 4, then such property is classified as an Animal Feeding Operation and a minimum animal inventory of the animal species involved *must be maintained* as shown (Table 4).

2. Animal Feeding Operations

As previously mentioned, “pastures or fields with well established browse lines on the trees and shrubs and exclusively bare ground will not qualify as grazing operations.” Such operations are considered Animal Feeding Operations.

Table 4. Minimum Annual Inventories for Animal Feeding Operations	
<i>Type of Operation</i>	<i>Minimum Number* To Qualify for Open Space Lands</i>
Cow/Calf	5 cows
Dairy (bovine)	25 cows
Ewe/Lamb	25 ewes
Doe/Kid	25 does
Mare/Foal	5 brood mares
Whitetail Deer	10 breeding does
Exotic Hoofstock	10 breeding females
*Minimum number to be maintained annually.	

In order to qualify for Open Space Land designation (according to the Property Tax Code), the intensity of an agricultural enterprise should parallel “...the degree of intensity generally accepted in the area...” The breeding female inventories shown in Table 4 are based on a minimum number of breeding females that would warrant owning/leasing/borrowing a breeding male (i.e. a female to male ratio typical of intensity commonly employed in Uvalde County).

Cropland Operations

Note: Minimum acreages are based on management of the agricultural enterprise at a level of intensity typical for similar operations in Uvalde County.

1. Row Crops

Minimum Size Requirement = 20 acres.

Involves the cultivation of soil and planting of crops with the intent of harvesting and sale or use of the harvest. Tillage practices must reflect (both type and intensity) those common for the chosen crop in Uvalde County.

2. Hay

Minimum Size Requirement = 20 acres.

Involves the practice of harvesting and baling forage(s) for sale or use as: a) animal feed or, b) plant propagation material. Cross fencing of hay fields is expected to be minimal. Evidence (ex. herbicide purchase/use records) of weed and brush control [when warranted] will substantiate maintenance of Open Space Lands designation for hay fields.

3. Orchard/Grove

Minimum Size Requirement = 5 acres.

Involves the practice of managing trees for the purpose of commercial fruit or nut production. Property manager must provide evidence of implementing basic horticulture management practices (ex. pruning, thinning, hedging, herbicide/pesticide/fungicide application, foliar fertilization, soil management, etc.). The floor of the orchard must be maintained to facilitate harvest. Evidence of harvest sales will substantiate the commercial intent of an orchard or grove.

4. Truck Farming

Minimum Size Requirement = 10 acres

Involves the commercial farming of fruits, vegetables or melons. The harvest is typically marketed wholesale, direct to the consumer (roadside or farmer's market) or you-pick. The ability to irrigate must be evident.

5. Vineyard

Minimum Size Requirement = 5 acres.

Involves the practice of managing vines for the purpose of commercial fruit production. Property manager must provide evidence of implementation of basic viticulture management practices (ex. pruning, herbicide/pesticide/fungicide application, soil management, etc.). Evidence of harvest and sale of fruit or the production of juice or wine will substantiate the commercial intent of a vineyard.

Special Operations

Note: These operations require intensive management and thus require special consideration regarding value.

1. Feedlot

Minimum Capacity = 1,000 head

Commercial feeding/finishing operations (beef, lamb or goat) may qualify for Open Space Land designation by providing proof of a business relationship with both a commercial slaughter facility and a finished ration or commodity supplier.

2. Swine

Minimum Intensity - continuous inventory of 5 brood sows or 30 feeder pigs

Commercial pork production including farrowing, finishing to slaughter weight or both. Consideration is limited to the land on which farrowing and feeding facilities are constructed, including lagoons for waste management. Commercial farrowing/finishing operations may qualify for Open Space Land designation by providing proof of a business relationship with both a commercial slaughter facility and a finished ration or commodity supplier.

3. Bees/Honey

A minimum and maximum acreage of 5 and 20 acres respectively to qualify beekeeping as an agricultural use. 5 acres need 6 hives, each additional 2 acres requires 1 additional hive. The primary purpose of domestic bees in Uvalde County is to serve as pollinators for crops. As such, bees are typically moved frequently as warranted for crop pollination. Commercial honey processing equipment (extractor, hot knives, packaging and labeling equipment, etc) must be present. Evidence of honey sales will substantiate the commercial intent of a beekeeper.

4. Poultry

Only the land under poultry houses (or pens involved in a 'pasture' production system) is eligible for Open Space Land designation.

Operation involves the production of meat or eggs for human consumption. Evidence of annual meat or eggs sales will substantiate commercial production.

5. Floriculture

Minimum Size Requirement = 3 acres

Floriculture is a discipline of horticulture concerned with the cultivation of flowering and ornamental plants for landscaping, gardens and for floristry. Floriculture crops include landscaping plants, bedding plants, flowering plants, foliage plants or houseplants, cut cultivated greens, and cut flowers.

6. Christmas Trees

Minimum Size Requirement = 5 acres

Involves cultivation and management of transplanted pine or fur trees for the Christmas tree market. Evidence of irrigation capability must be present. A regular schedule of planting, thinning, shaping, harvest and sales must be evident.

7. Turf Grass

Minimum Size Requirement = 20 acres

Involves cultivation and management of sod to produce turf grass for sale to wholesale or retail outlets. In Uvalde County, the ability to irrigate is required. An effective weed and pest management program must be evident.

Exceptions ... *to the Intensity Standards included above*

A. Acreage in a **residential subdivision or development** with a ***home built on the property*** **does not** qualify for Open Space Land designation. In such cases, any agricultural activity is considered secondary. (refer to page 2)

B. If a property fails to demonstrate sufficient agricultural activity and such inactivity is a due to natural disaster (drought, flood or fire), these intensity standards may be waived for the one (1) year; a) in which the disaster occurred or, b) the year following disaster occurrence. The property will be subject to reappraisal the following year.

Periodic Adjustment

Intensity Standards are subject to periodic review and revision by the Uvalde County Appraisal District's Agricultural Advisory Board. In addition, periodic adjustments may be warranted in order to remain in compliance with the State Property Tax Board Appraisal Manual and/or Texas Property Tax Codes.

Table 3. Range/Ecological Sites and Associated Carrying Capacities*

The purpose of this table is to provide general sustainable stocking rate recommendations for grazing operations in two distinct geographic regions (Major Land Resource Areas) of Uvalde County. Presented herein are high, medium and low stocking rates within two major resource areas.

Major Land Resource Area	Location in Uvalde County	Site Description	Typical Carrying Capacity, Acres/AUY**
Edwards Plateau, Eastern	Generally, the area north of a line from the intersection of FM 1796/FM 187 to Cline	Bottomlands, relatively flat, minimal rock, minimal juniper encroachment <i>Bottomland RSD</i>	13-20
“	“	Gravelly ridge, undulating to rolling uplands, slopes from 3 to 30 percent, fair range condition <i>Gravelly Ridge RSD</i>	31-39
“	“	Steep rocky, steep escarpments and slopes often having large limestone rocks to the surface, slopes range from 8 to 40 percent, elevations from 2000 to 2800 feet; fair range condition <i>Steep Rocky RSD</i>	60+
Rio Grande Plain, Northern	Generally, the area south of a line from the intersection of FM 1796/FM 187 to Cline	Nearly level upland, slopes level to 8 percent bordering natural drains, loamy brown/black soils; fair range condition <i>Blackland RSD</i>	13-17
“	“	Convex gently sloping to strongly sloping ridgetop areas, slopes of 1 to 8 percent, elevations from 400-900 feet, sandstone and ironstone outcrops occur; fair range condition <i>Sandstone Hill RSD</i>	19-28

Table 3. continued

Major Land Resource Area	Location in Uvalde County	Site Description	Typical Carrying Capacity, Acres/AUY**
Rio Grande Plain, Northern	Generally, the area south of a line from the intersection of FM 1796/FM 187 to Cline	Undulating to rolling uplands, slope gradients from 3 to 30 percent, gravelly loam soils; fair range condition <i>Gravelly Ridge RSD</i>	31-39
Introduced Grass Pasture	Countywide	Monoculture of introduced grass (Ex. Old World bluestems, Kleingrass, Bermuda grasses, Buffel grass)	Irrigated 3-6 Dryland 7-15

*Major Land Resource Areas, Range/Ecological Site Descriptions and associated carrying capacities from the Natural Resource Conservation Service electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG). <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/>
** AUY = Animal Unit Year

*Additional Information on the Texas Cooperative Extension Service (A&M University System)

PECA ORCHARD

Recommended size = 10 acres

Texas Cooperative Extension Service (A&M University System) recommend managing pecan trees by thinning out weak, spindly and/or damaged trees, also by the selection of the best production of trees and by topping out smaller trees at 6ft of the ground. They also recommend spraying zinc & nitrogen fertilizer several times a year.

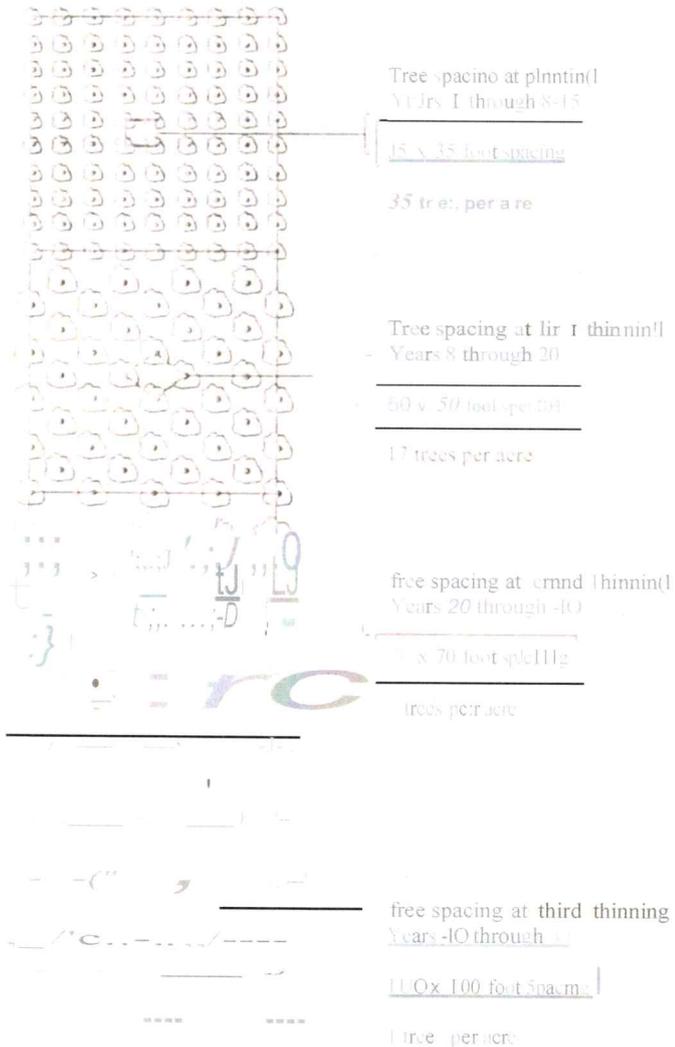


Figure 1. Pecan orchard thinning schedule by row number trees JS Lhev

Beekeeping Operations

The Texas Tax Code, Title 1, Chapter 23, Subchapter D, Section 23.51 {2} includes: the term agricultural use to include the use of land to raise or keep bees for pollination or for the production of human food or other tangible products having a commercial value, provided that the land used is not less than 5 or more than 20 acres.

Application, Current and Principal Use, and History

The application, use and history requirements for beekeeping are all the same as for agricultural land use.

Pursuant to Chapter 131 of the Texas Agricultural Code, apiaries are subject to regulatory oversight by the Texas Apiary Inspection Service who reports to the Director of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.

Degree of Intensity

The site must be suitable for bees and provide the necessary elements for bees to thrive. You will need to have a minimum of 6 acres if there is a home on the property, and you also need to have agricultural activities occurring on your land for a minimum of 5 years before you can qualify for the ag valuation.

A property owner must have five acres in use, or a minimum of six acres if there is a home site or future home site, and no more than twenty acres, with a minimum of six active hives. The property owner must also provide documentation of their registration with the Texas Apiary Inspection Service.

In addition to the minimum of six active hives, for each additional two {2} acres, one additional active hive is required.

Acres	Hives		Acres	Hives
5	6		13	10
7	7		15	11
9	8		17	12
11	9		19	13

The degree of intensity requirements also includes standard beekeeping practices such as, but not limited to:

1. Appropriate equipment includes but not limited to the components of the hive, protective gear, smoker and hive tools, and the equipment you need for handling the honeycomb.
2. Abide by all beekeeping rules and regulations set forth by the State of Texas, and
3. Perform best management practices which should include, but are not limited to:

- a. Checking hives periodically, at least once a month, and keeping good records to improve practice general management of the colonies, nutrition and pest management.
- b. Control tall vegetation around colonies and keep apiaries clean
- c. Ensure honeybee hives have sufficient resources throughout the year.
 - i. Unless there are natural water sources adjacent to the apiary, establish a perpetual water source nearby.
 - ii. Supplemental food when resources are limited
- d. Pest and disease management.

Under Open-space productivity valuation, values are calculated using a modified income approach to determine the per acre value. This is done using cash lease rates that are collected each year through survey mailed to landowners. The challenge with determining productivity value for beekeeping using the cash lease method is usually beekeepers do not lease the land on which the hives are located. In most instances, a property owner who has hives located on the land does not have an open-space valuation and is performing the practices to establish the history for an agricultural use valuation.