

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

**McMULLEN CENTRAL APPRIASAL DISTRICT  
(ADOPTED NOVEMBER 17, 2016)**

## INTENSITY STANDARDS FOR OPEN SPACE LAND

In Section 23.51 (1) of the Property Tax Code, “Qualified open space land” is “land that currently is devoted primarily 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 agricultural operations. In order to help the Central Appraisal districts define these standards, the State Legislature provided for an outside advisory committee to be formed for this purpose. In order to qualify, open space land must meet or exceed these minimum standards for McMullen County.

**A. Operational Definitions:** Only those operations that are truly commercial in nature were considered for defining these standards. The “Manual for the Appraisal of Agricultural Land” tasks the Central Appraisal Districts with eliminating causal agricultural operations from qualifying for Open Space Land Special Valuations. There are three major categories of agricultural operations in McMullen County. These categories are Cropland, Pastureland and Special Operations. These are further broken down in subcategories. Their breakdowns are as follows:

### Cropland

Row Crop (small, grains)  
Orchard (fruits/nuts, olives)  
Hay Crop (haygrazer, oats,  
Sudan, alfalfa, tifton jiggs)  
Truck Farm (vegetable)  
Vineyards (grapes, wines, sod farms)

### Pastureland

Improved Pasture (Coastal/Buffel, Tifton Jiggs)  
Native Pasture (Buffel Grass, Plains Bristle)  
Brush Land (Mesquite, Oak)

### Special Operations

Dairy

Permaculture

Feedlot

Floriculture, Green House

Hog Operations

Poultry

Bee/Honey

**B. Subcategories:** The subcategories are further broken into irrigated/dryland categories depending on water usage. The final breakdown is as to class of soil, which affects the land’s ability to produce. Pastureland category, as its name implies, will involve some type of grazing operation. Intensity standards must be derived using all the above listed factors. No set statewide standard can be used since all lands and not even all categories are the same statewide.

1. **Grazing Operations:** Grazing operations may be classed as one of any of the following:
  - a. **Beef Cow/Calf.** This operation is in the business of raising beef for sale to either processor to other operators as breeding stock. These operators include the purebred operations, also the commercial breeder who sells calves to the local stock markets. Typical requirements in McMullen County include several cows of breeding age that have been bred by a bull or A/I service. One cow/calf pair or mature individual is considered equivalent to one animal unit. (See Chart #1)
  - b. **Dairy Cow/Calf.** This operation is the business of producing milk/cheese products. This operation involves dairy type breeds such as Holstein and Guernsey. Typical operation involves a bull on location or A/I service to several head of breeding age cows. Calf production is necessary to the continual production of milk, and thus is a secondary crop for the dairy producer. Calves are weaned very early from mother cows and fed out to sell to processors as veal or to local stock markets to supply the stocker calf operators. Heifer calves are returned to the herd as milk producers. Dairy herds are confined to improved pastures and in great numbers (50 to 100 head) which requires great amount of supplemental feeding. Dairies have also involved some cultivating of grain crops or fodder to support this supplemental food need. One animal unit is equal to one cow/calf pair or one mature individual. (See Chart #1)
  - c. **Feeder/Stocker Calf.** This operation is in the business of raising beef for processors. This operation involves acquiring calves at a certain weight from cow/calf operators and raising the calves until they gain weight (slaughter weight). Although both heifer and steer calves can be found in these type of operation, steer calves are the most prevalent. One animal unit is equal to two calves. ( See Chart #1)
  - d. **Sheep.** This operation is in the business of providing two by-products, wool and meat. Sheep operation may be purebred operation or a commercial operation. Commercial would not require any particular type of breed and is usually in the business of meat production only. Purebred operations are normally primarily in the business of producing either wool, meat or animals to sale for other producers as breeding stock. Typical flocks in McMullen County range from 50 head of ewes and to three head of rams to larger numbers. One animal unit of sheep is equal to five heads of ewes or four head of rams. (See Chart #1)

- e. Goats.** This operation is in the business of producing primarily two by-products, mohair and meat. Typically in McMullen County, mohair operations consist of a herd of Angora goats, and meat operations consist of a herd of Spanish goats. All other breeds in McMullen County are involved in the production of meat (cabrito or young kid goat). The Nubian breed of goat also may produce dairy by-products as a secondary use. Angora flocks may range from 50 head of does and two to three head of bucks. One animal unit of goats is equal to five head of does or five head of bucks. (See Chart #1)
- f. Horses.** This operation is now limited to breeding operations only. The by-products are colts and fillies. This operation involves having brood mares and either stud (stallion) on location or A/I service. This operation will involve facilities for the care, breeding and raising of brood stock and their offspring together with intensive training of colts or fillies if operation involves any number of breeds and is not limited to thoroughbred and quarterhorse breeds. Typical pastures are of the improved variety such as coastal and alfalfa. One horse equals one animal unit. (See Chart #1) Several head of mares are required in a breeding operation. Supplemental feeding is a given fact of operation in McMullen County. Breeding associations have suggested that a minimum amount of acreage for the typical breeder is in the 15-20 acre range.
- g. Exotics.** This operation involves the raising of deer and antelope breeds that are not native to Texas for supplying meat and/or leather for the specialty markets. The pastures that are involved in this type of operation require seven to eight foot perimeter fence. This fence is made up of wire mesh and may have barbed wire at the top. In order to qualify, the operator should be able to provide the district a harvesting schedule. One animal unit of exotics is equal to seven does or seven bucks.

### **Chart #1 –Animal Units**

<u>Types of Livestock:</u>	<u>Numbers</u>	<u>Animal Unit</u>
Stocker Calf	1	0.50
Yearling (short yearling)	1	0.60
Long Yearling or 2 yr. old	1	1.00
Bull	1	1.00
Rams	5	1.00
Buck (goat)	5	1.00
Two year old horse	1	1.00
Mature Cow	1	1.00
Ewes	5	1.00
Does (goat)	5	1.00
Deer	7	1.00

**2. Typical Herd Size.** The following chart summarizes the typical herd sizes found in McMullen County and relates that back to Chart #1. The following minimums can be derived from our operational definitions:

<u>Type of Operation</u>	<u>Typical Size</u>	<u>Animal Unit</u>
Beef Cow/Calf	10 hd.	10+
Dairy Cow/Calf	50 hd.	50+
Feeder/Stocker	20 hd.	10+
Sheep	50 hd.	10+
Goats	50 hd.	10+
Horses	5 hd.	5+
Exotics	30 hd.	4+

Note: the minimums are derived using herd size (#hd.) to animal units using Chart #1.

**3. Stocking Ratio.** Another minimum intensity standard is a stocking ratio (number of acres that will support one animal unit.) Chart #2 reflects the relationship of pastureland and soil types and carrying capacities typical in McMullen County.

### **Chart #2 – Stocking Ratios**

<u>Pasture Type</u>	<u>CC/AU</u>
Native (refers to all pasture types)	30.0 average

The above stated minimum intensity standards can be applied as a qualifying test for open space (1-D-1). In larger acreage operations, the stocking ratio would be a more reliable test.

- 4. Additional Typical Grazing Requirements.** The only other typical requirement for McMullen County grazing land is that its perimeter be completely fenced. One strand electric wire is not acceptable for permanent pasture operations, but may be used in addition to acceptable wire fences. Typical fence for a permanent pasture is either five strand barbed wire for cattle operations or mesh with two strands of barbed wire on top for sheep and goat or combination operation. Horse operation fences should not have barbed wire fences but have either smooth wire or rail type fence.
- 5. Cropland Operations.** Cropland operations can be classed as follows (Note: The minimum acreage are based on an owner operator following typical agriculture practice for the type of operation involved).
- a. Row Crop.** This operation involves the cultivation of the soil for planting grain crops with the intent of harvest for sale or for feed such as corn, wheat, and milo. A high degree of cultivation must be evident in order to qualify (no regrowth brush). In McMullen County, cropland is leased either on a share lease basis or a cash lease basis. Twenty acres is a minimum size requirement for this type operation.
  - b. Hay Crop.** This operation involves the cultivation of planted or maintained grasses such as Coastal or hybrid Sorghum grasses. These grasses are then cut and baled for sale as livestock feed. Cross fencing must be to a minimum and weed and brush control must be evident. Twenty acres is a minimum size requirement for this type of operation.
  - c. Truck Farming.** This operation is in the business of cultivating the soil for planting vegetables. This type of operation depends on a good source of water, thus some type of irrigation equipment must be evident. This type of operation typically requires a minimum of ten acres in McMullen County.
  - d. Orchard/Vineyard.** This operations in the business of cultivating and growing of trees or grapevines that produce crops of nuts (pecans) or fruits (peaches, grapes, olives). A regular schedule of pruning and spraying and cultivation or close mowed turf grass as brush and weed control must be evident. This operation like truck farming can yield good harvests off small acreage, thus minimum size requirement would be five plus acres.

**6. Special Operation.** The special operations in McMullen County is as follows (Note: these operations are intensive in nature thus requiring special handling from a value standpoint):

- a. Feedlots.** These operations take calves and feed them for finishing purposes before slaughter. These operation pack the feedbunk allowing roughly 100 square feet per animal to maximum feed conversion in each animal. In McMullen County, the minimum capacity for a feedlot is 1,000 head.
- b. Floriculture (green house).** This operation is in the business of cultivating plants or nursery stock in pots on top of the ground. This stock is then sold wholesale to nurseries. Intensive conditions exist on small acreages; a minimum size requirement would be three plus acres.
- c. Bee/Honey.** This operation involves the placing of hives in order for the honey bee to produce honeycomb. This honeycomb is processed into pure honey food product for human consumption. The hives are placed in groups in an open pasture. Only land directly under the hives will qualify for Open Space.
- d. Poultry.** This operation involves the raising of chickens or turkeys as meat for human consumption. Chicken operations may involve the harvesting of eggs as well. This operation involves raising the birds in large barns holding thousands of birds. The barns then with some surrounding land for access would qualify.
- e. Hog Operations.** This operation involves the raising of hogs for the pork meat market. Typically, in McMullen County, the hogs are confined to small pen areas. Also large numbers of hogs can be kept on small acreage. Minimum intensity requirement is five breeding sows or 30 feeder pigs. (One animal unit equals one mature individual.) Only the land involved with the pen area will qualify.
- f. Permaculture.** This operation is in the business of cultivating herbs and medicinal type plants not native to this area using the native plan cover to protect the budding plants. This operation is intensive on small acreage; the minimum acreage requirements three plus acres.
- g. Turf Grass Farm.** This operation is in the business of cultivating turf type grasses for wholesale to landscapers and builders. A high degree of weed and pest control must be evident. This operation always involves irrigation and thus should be evident as well. The minimum acreage in McMullen County is 20 acres.

7. **Guideline Exceptions.** Typically ten acres or less of agricultural land is leased and run as a part of a larger operation.

- a.** If a small tract is leased as part of a larger operation, it may qualify. Written verification of participation in a larger operation must be on file with the McMullen Central Appraisal District. This written documentation can be a written lease and/or a written statement from the property owner that an oral agreement is in effect. IF a statement is used, the location of property, parties involved and length of agreement must be stated.
- b.** Small acreage in a built-up and primarily residential area with a home built upon the tract with agricultural use being secondary does not qualify. Open Space Land must have agriculture as primary use in order to qualify.
- c.** If a tract shows no activity and this lack of activity is because of disaster (drought, flood, etc.) reasons, these standards may be set aside for the year that the disaster occurs. The tract then will be subject to reappraisal the following year.

8. **Periodic Adjustment.** These standards are subject to periodic review by the Agricultural Advisory Board to keep them current with what is typical agricultural practice in McMullen County. Also from time to time, adjustments will be needed to comply with changes in either the Comptroller of Public Accounts appraisal manual or Texas Property Tax Codes.