

# 10 Year Vision

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## Introduction

King County has some of the best conditions for farming in the country, if not the world: highly productive river bottom soils; a large population interested in local food production; a climate that provides temperatures for an almost year round growing season; and rains that leave relatively small irrigation requirements. Carnation Farm once had the world record for milk production; two Snoqualmie Valley families had the national record for milk production on individual farms. The City of Bellevue exists where there was once a bounty of strawberry yields produced by Japanese farmers before World War II. In 1940, King County produced the most lettuce of any county in the nation. This climate is what made Whidbey Island set the national record for bushels of wheat produced per acre. As one farmer has said: "With every inch of rain that drops here, I get an extra ton of corn and it doesn't cost me a dime..."

King County has a remarkable history of public actions to preserve farmlands and markets and to encourage farming within the county. In the 1979 voters approved the Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) while at the same time fighting to preserve the Pike Place Market. The FPP has successfully preserved almost 13,000 acres of prized farmland for this and future generations. In 1985, the King County Comprehensive Plan designated approximately 40,000 acres as Agricultural Production Districts, where much of commercial farming occurs. The Current Use Taxation is another program that has proven to be an important way to ensure that farmland remains in agricultural use.

The Agriculture Commission was established in 1994 to support active oversight of these lands by the County, and to promote a healthy agricultural economy. Among its many accomplishments, the Commission played a critical role in establishing the Puget Sound Fresh and Farmlink programs and continues to find ways to enhance local markets and develop opportunities that encourage a new generation of farmers. Through these efforts, a good base of land has been preserved for farming.

But more work is needed. Good farmlands not preserved continue to be lost to new development, and farming can be difficult in a rapidly urbanizing county. While the urban area provides a thriving market potential, it also poses many threats to local agriculture. Major steps need to be taken to insure that the county's efforts provide the basis for increasing local food production in a world where the benefits of local food supply are increasing on a daily basis.

# Goals:

## **Overall goals**

1. To preserve agricultural lands within King County's Agricultural Production Districts and Rural Areas; and
2. To promote and nurture the business of farming in King County for this and future generations.

## **10 year goals.**

### **The Vision**

#### **More Farmers Farming**

##### **1. Promote Access to Farmland**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Conduct an economic analysis of purchasing additional development rights on lands where development rights have already been acquired by the County to reduce sub dividing
- Draft criteria suggesting that applicants be asked to describe how farming will continue on their land for the foreseeable future
- Give farmers who agree to participate in the farm link/farm mentoring program, which matches new farmers with retiring farmers (described below), special consideration in the evaluation of the property
- Work on ways to keep FPP land in active farming, especially when FPP land changes hands.
- Include a sizable amount of funds to acquire additional development rights in King County in next major funding initiative for the purpose of acquiring more farmland.
- Utilize clustering, transfer of development rights, and density bonuses to encourage landowners to keep their lands in agricultural use
- Work on home size issues as related to affordability on Ag zoned land.

##### **2. Support Intergenerational Transfer of Farmland and Ag Knowledge**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Develop a partnership with FarmLink and other appropriate groups to find farmers for County owned land
- Link the FPP program and FarmLink more closely
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- Increase support and funding for the FarmLink Program
- Develop a "mentoring" program which would provide an opportunity for experienced farmers to share their knowledge and resources with new farmers.
- Work with the existing high school and other vocational programs to create training programs for new farmers.

3. **Develop a demonstration farm (or several farms on smaller sites) to serve as testing sites for research and technical assistance on high intensity urban fringe farming. The farm(s) would also provide public education to teach citizens about farming.**

How might we achieve the goal?

- The public benefits could include: making land available to beginning farmers, skills training for beginning farmers, promotion and training of sustainable agricultural practices, public education about organic farming or other conservation practice

4. **Expand the existing tax incentive programs to provide further benefit to farmers**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Require that land (already or ASAP) be enrolled in Current Use Taxation (CUT) program to be eligible for the Farmland Preservation Program.
- Work with Assessor's office to develop a marketing program for CUT
- Work with the Assessor's Office in an advisory role to develop policies that improve agriculture activities.

## **The vision**

### **Our Farmers will Have More Market Opportunities**

1. **Develop new food markets and using Puget Sound Fresh as a tool**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Increase farmers markets and CSAs as needed
- Develop cooperatives for small farmers to access institutions
- Develop scale appropriate slaughter facilities for livestock owners
- Facilitate emerging ethnic specialty markets

2. **Develop secondary markets for added farm revenue:**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Biofuels
- Manure
- Agro-tourism

3. **Expand partnerships with other counties in the Puget Sound Region**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Focus on Farming with Snohomish County
- Puget Sound meat project
- Puget Sound Fresh

#### **4. Continue to provide education related to agriculture**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Continue to work with the Cooperative Extension Service to make sure King County farmers have dedicated agents for horticulture and livestock, and sufficient resources from a statewide dairy team
- Fund an endowment that would provide grants to conduct specific research, technical assistance and education programs that would benefit local farmers: energy efficiency, waste stream markets, ethnic products, etc...

## **The Vision**

### **Our Regulations will be more Farm and Food Friendly**

#### **1. Continue to look at regulations**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Continue regulatory reform, with a particular emphasis on the cost of building permit fees, the time it takes to acquire building permits for farm-related structures, and drainage maintenance.
- Continue to streamline permits and coordinate regulations among local, state and federal agencies.
- Allow temporary housing for farm workers.
- Continue to review proposed policies and regulations prior to adoption, and existing policies and regulations that have a substantial impact on farmers
- Analyze how upslope regulations and innovative technologies could reduce field inundation and improve drainage.
- Enhance the Agricultural Ditch Assistance Program (ADAP, aka, Fish and Ditch) to reduce costs and lead times.

#### **2. Continue to identify additional ways in which the zoning code could be amended to preserve the integrity of the farmland while allowing greater flexibility to farmers in developing commercial uses that support agricultural production.**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Continue to develop more flexible ways to enhance on site sales of agricultural products.

#### **3. Expand services that help farmers receive better, more efficient service from King County.**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Continue problem solving, workshops and outreach by Ag Permit Team
- Expand farmbudsman services.
- Provide direct access to KCD farm planners...

**4. Assistance in completing permit processes at the local, state, and federal level**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Information about available tax incentive programs;
- Assistance in working with the Conservation District to complete farm plans.
- Provide information about available grants, loans, or other forms of governmental assistance.
- Provide information about regulatory requirements.
- Cooperate with other regulatory agencies to improve and streamline regulations

**5. More closely monitor the activities in the Agricultural Production Districts**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Increase GIS mapping of activities and uses
- Increase communications with land owners
- Work with other agencies to coordinate efforts to encourage more farming in the APDs

**The Vision**

**The Threats to Agriculture will be Diminished**

**1. Look for ways to adapt to and help reduce the effects of climate change.**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Develop innovative ways to increase the water supply (Water storage ponds, reclaimed water etc.) for irrigation.
- Improve drainage systems through the APDs
- Develop growing techniques that are more adaptable to climate variations (i.e. greenhouses)
- Improve programs that allow farmers to protect themselves from wildfires

**2. Develop a regional effort to reduce the impacts of growth**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Educate cities and agencies on the importance of agriculture
- Encourage participation of Ag interests when projects such as road expansions are being planned
- Encourage participation of Ag interests on planning boards
- Partner with neighboring counties and the State to coordinate policies and regulations
- The remaining prime farmlands in the Urban Growth Area should be evaluated for their potential value for food production. Those areas that could continue to perform small-scale agricultural activities, such as market gardens, livestock operations, community pea patches, or as educational or research farms, shall be zoned for agriculture.
- Create Right To Farm legislation

**3. Expand a regional effort to enhance Ag**

How might we achieve the goal?

- Focus on Farming
- Develop programs with NW Ag Business Center
- Continue to support Puget Sound Fresh

**4. Clearly define what Agriculture is**

How might we achieve the goal?

- With other counties, organizations and the State to develop a vision of what Ag is.
- Work with local farmers to define Ag uses

## SWOT Analysis

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>	<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Threats</u>
Easy access to a large market	Too much land underutilized	Increased market access (more CSAs, farmers markets)	Land speculation growth of cities
Lots of direct marketing opportunities	Too much wet land; Flooding	Developing new products (value added)	Lack of capital for beginning growers
Mild climate allows for a long growing season	Lack of infrastructure	Selling to institutions (schools, restaurants etc.)	High cost of land
Diverse crop and animal production	Regulatory issues	Agritourism	Availability of water for irrigation
Best soil in the country	Traffic issues	Educational opportunities (school tours)	Conversion of ag land to non ag uses
Lots of technical assistance	Lack of labor	Grass fed meats	<u>Mansions?</u>
There is still enough land to provide a significant amount of food for County residents	No affordable worker housing	Cideries	<u>Horses?</u>
Ability to charge what the product is worth	More expensive to get into farming	Ability to address food safety concerns (putting a face on food)	Urban Sprawl
Selling directly to the consumer	Lots of small parcels	Sheep and goats for ethnic markets	Flooding
Good grass growing	Funding programs (Farmlink)	Biofuels?	Large scale restoration projects?
Puget Sound Fresh	Lack of understanding about Ag in the County (many people think there is no Ag; or more than there is; or that we have large exports, etc)	Climate change	Transportation projects.
Strong consumer interest in local food			Obstacles to Drainage Mitigation Projects Climate change