

Urban Agriculture and Farmland Preservation for Olympia

Report from the Olympia Farmland Work Group

July 6, 2021

Olympia Farmland Work Group

The Farmland Work Group formed through a referral from the Olympia City Council in response to the plan to remove the Spooner's Berry farm on the Yelm Highway property from the inventory of regional farmland. The group was tasked with developing recommendations for the Land Use and Environment Committee to meet the local food goals of the Comprehensive Plan, and specifically about mitigating the loss of farmland.

City of Olympia

Dani Madrone, *City Council*

Lisa Parshley, *City Council*

Leonard Bauer, *Director of Community Planning and Development*

Paul Simmons, *Director of Parks, Arts & Recreation*

Thurston Conservation District

TJ Johnson, *Board of Supervisors*

Sarah Moorehead, *Executive Director*

Community Farm Land Trust

Patrick Rofo, *Executive Director*

Thank you to Marcie Cleaver, member of the Community Farm Land Trust board of directors, for helping to kick off the process!

Referral

On June 2, 2020, a referral to the Land Use and Environment Committee was accepted by the Olympia City Council. It was sponsored by Dani Madrone and supported by Lisa Parshley and Jessica Bateman.

The production of local food is a strong value in Olympia and the region, as evidenced by the success of the Farmer's Market, local food organizations, initiatives by the Economic Development Council, and our Comprehensive Plan. However, Thurston County loses more and more farmland every year. In Olympia, we lack a policy that protects farmland from the urbanization that comes with population growth. Local food production is identified as an economic value in our Comprehensive Plan and should be part of the strategy as we recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

To support the values and actions needed to protect farmland, Olympia needs a "no net loss" policy. This will preserve our remaining farmland in the city and urban growth area or mitigate what is lost by replacing it within the city or county.

A "no net loss" policy for farmland will enhance and protect the thriving local food system which already exists in Olympia and the region. The city is responsible for protecting farmland within city limits and the urban growth area as a component of growth management. It is firmly imbedded in our Comprehensive Plan to work with local governments in the region to protect farmland, encourage farming in the community, increase and expand access to local food production, reduce

the energy and environmental impact of our food system, and work with community organizations to develop these strategies.

This referral will be sent to the Land Use and Environment Committee for an upcoming agenda. In the meantime, Councilmember Madrone will work with the Thurston Conservation District and Community Farm Land Trust to determine how much farmland remains in Olympia. A proposal will be developed for the review of LUEC and staff on a policy for preserving or mitigating the loss of this farmland.

This issue is time sensitive because it will have implications for the park planning on the parcel that is currently being used by Spooner's Berry Farm. A policy should come to the Council before the completion of the Yelm Highway Community Park plan.

Connection to City and Regional Plans

Olympia Comprehensive Plan

The preservation of farmland and support of local food production is well supported in Olympia's Comprehensive Plan. This value is highlighted through this statement in the Community Values & Vision chapter:

"Meanwhile, on the city's outskirts, small farms will continue to expand. Local food producers will further diversify local employment opportunities and help local residents and businesses be less vulnerable to the rising cost of imported food."

Supporting actions include:

- **PL25.3:** Collaborate with community partners to ensure that everyone within Olympia is within biking or walking distance of a place to grow food.
- **PL25.4:** Encourage for-profit gardening and farming in the community.
- **PL25.8:** Work with community organizations to develop strategies, measure, and set goals for increasing local food production.
- **PL25.9:** Work with local governments throughout the region to help protect existing agricultural lands and develop and promote a vibrant local food economy.
- **PR9.1:** Provide opportunities that promote a mentally and physically active lifestyle and healthy food choices, including participation in local food production.
- **PN8.7:** Reduce energy use and the environmental impact of our food system by encouraging local food production.

City Council 2017 Resolution

On December 19, 2017, the Olympia City Council approved a resolution supporting community gardens.¹ This resolution was brought forward by Sustainable South Sound. It states: "The city of Olympia supports the creation of sustainable community gardens on both public and private property and will establish policies, procedures, and programs to support the goal of having community gardens on both public and private property within one-half mile of every resident of the city" and "will work with non-profit

¹ Olympia City Council resolution from December 2017:

<https://olympia.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5692214&GUID=0001AB48-78C1-4E59-AA09-BA1622DF17A7>

organizations, gardeners, and neighborhood groups to identify public and private land suitable for community gardens.”

Sustainable Thurston

In 2014, *Creating Places - Preserving Spaces: A Sustainable Development Plan for the Thurston Region*² was developed by the Thurston Regional Planning Council and supported by the Olympia City Council. The goal of this planning process was to ask the question: “How do you want your community to look, function, and feel in 2035?”

The 2021 Buildable Lands Report³ states that, while Thurston County is on track to meet the urban density requirements of the Growth Management Act, the region is not on track to meet the more ambitious land use targets adopted through the Sustainable Thurston Plan. It has been a target to build 95% of new housing within city limits, with 72% of all households within a half mile of an urban center, corridor, or neighborhood center. Current projections show we are heading towards 87% and 57%, respectively. The goal of “no net loss” of farmland is tied to these goals for urban density:

Preserve environmentally sensitive lands, farmlands, forest lands, prairies, and rural lands and develop compact urban areas.

Target: Between 2010 and 2035, no more than 5 percent of new housing will locate in the rural areas, and 95 percent will be within cities, towns, unincorporated growth areas, and tribal reservations. Rural areas include land outside of the cities, towns, unincorporated urban growth areas and tribal reservations

Supporting Target: No net loss of farmlands, forest lands, prairie habitats (in addition to environmentally critical areas that are currently protected) while providing for a range of densities within rural Thurston County.

Action: Take appropriate steps (e.g., incentives, support agricultural economy, purchase or transfer of development rights, rural zoning changes) to achieve goals.

The Sustainable Thurston Plan also has a specific priority to support local food systems:

Support local food systems to increase community resilience, health, and economic prosperity.

Target: To be determined after development of a local food systems plan.

Action: Create a local food systems plan.

Goal F-1: Coordinate local food planning efforts to create a socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable regional system.

F-1.1: Convene a food policy council/advisory group, bringing all the food “players” to the table and develop a local food systems plan, including a production capacity analysis.

² Sustainable Thurston Plan, Thurston Regional Planning Council, 2014: <https://www.trpc.org/260/Sustainable-Thurston-Plan>

³ Buildable Lands Report for Thurston County, Thurston Regional Planning Council, June 2021: <https://www.trpc.org/DocumentCenter/View/8542/2021-Buildable-Lands-Report-2021-05-25>

F-1.3: Consider food-related places as “destinations” in land-use and transportation planning. Consciously plan where to locate a food bank, a meal program, a farm, or a store.

Goal F-2: Enhance the Economic Viability of the Local Food System

F-2.8: To support no-net loss of agricultural and resource lands, a primary sustainability goal, create cooperative opportunities for joint purchase of land and incentives for using lands for farming, and zone existing farmlands for agriculture.

F-2.9: Encourage urban and rural agriculture by lowering the cost of water, including subsidizing or providing reclaimed water options at a lower rate. Encourage State Department of Ecology to expand allowable rainwater harvesting without violating water rights law to support agriculture.

F-3.8: Encourage food production in urban areas/neighborhoods.

Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Goals

The *Thurston County Climate Mitigation Plan*⁴ has established farmland preservation and regenerative agriculture as a priority for carbon sequestration. The Steering Committee is working on producing a white paper to bring more definition and focus to the carbon sequestration strategies, which will include regenerative agriculture.

The *Climate Adaptation Plan*⁵ also has a strategy for agriculture:

P-08: Increase urban agriculture and biointensive farming methods to maximize crop yields and ecosystem services. Municipalities and their partners can encourage such practices by providing technical support and incentives.

Scope of Olympia Farmland Work Group

In the scoping for the work of this project, it was identified that agriculture policy needs to support all three of these key needs to be sustainable:

1. Agricultural land (i.e. with prime soils) conserved for farming
2. Economic viability of farming
3. Farmers who want to farm

Policy from the City of Olympia can have the greatest effect on conserving land for farming and, to some extent, its economic viability. Therefore, those are the focus of the work group, recognizing that partnering with other jurisdictions and organizations is necessary to achieve all three key needs.

Key Policy Questions

In the scoping process, four key questions were brought forward:

⁴ Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan, Thurston Regional Planning Council, December 2020: <https://www.trpc.org/909/Thurston-Climate-Mitigation-Plan>

⁵ Thurston Climate Adaptation Plan, Thurston Regional Planning Council, 2018: <https://www.trpc.org/580/Thurston-Climate-Adaptation-Plan>

1. How can 'no net loss' be defined in the context of an approach to agriculture in Olympia and its UGA?
2. How does 'mitigation' play a role in the that context, and should it be defined?
3. What should be the priority approaches or tools toward these policies in Olympia and its UGA?
4. How can Olympia's approaches/tools complement those of Thurston County and neighboring cities?

Strategy and Timeline

June 2020	Workgroup established through referral at City Council
January 2021	Inventory of farmland in Olympia and UGA completed by TCD (Appendix A)
April 2021	Farm-friendly assessment (Appendix B)
April 2021	Policy tools from Thurston County Ag Survey reviewed for applicability in UGA
May 2021	Summary of current activities and resources of local organizations (Appendix C)
June 2021	Seek updates from cities and counties regarding effective tools inside UGAs
July 2021	Analyze data and bring recommendations for further development to the Land Use and Environment Committee
Ongoing	Monitor the Thurston County Agriculture Advisory Committee process

What else is happening in the region?

Thurston County Agriculture

Thurston County's farmland is disappearing. According to research conducted by the WSU Extension Office,⁶ between 1950 and 2017, the acreage of farmland as reported in the USDA Census of Agriculture declined from 170,640 acres to 62,250 acres. Between 2012 and 2017, despite the goals established by the Sustainable Thurston Plan, the County experienced the largest decline since 1974. According to a 2015 analysis⁷ conducted by the Thurston Regional Planning Council, 6,500 acres of farmland were lost to development between 2000 and 2015, and 22,600 acres of farmland were at risk of development.

In 2019, Futurewise appealed the County's Comprehensive Plan update because the plan does not include the designation of agriculture lands of long-term significance, noting that Thurston County has the second lowest percentage of protected farmland of all counties of Washington.⁸ Futurewise reached a preliminary settlement with Thurston County in which the county has agreed to study the agricultural lands policies. The County has been making progress on this work at the same time the Olympia Farmland Work Group has been studying issues in the city and UGA. They recently produced the results of a survey that are discussed below.

Thurston Strong

Thurston Strong⁹ is a regional effort for economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. They have assisted agriculture businesses in accessing grants to preserve their livelihoods. Part of their strategy for economy recovery is the Thurston County Agriculture Market Reset, proposed to be budgeted at \$2.1 million dollars.

⁶ Agriculture in Thurston County, WSU Extension Office: <https://extension.wsu.edu/thurston/agriculture/>

⁷ Thurston Region Farmland Snapshot, Thurston Regional Planning Council: <https://www.trpc.org/633/Farmland-Snapshot>

⁸ Wonkabout Washington: Futurewise 2020 Legal Review, The Urbanist, February 24, 2020:

<https://www.theurbanist.org/2020/02/24/wonkabout-washington-futurewise-2020-legal-preview/>

⁹ Thurston Strong: <https://www.thurstonstrong.org/>

Olympia already plays a role in building the urban market for regional food through the support of the Farmer's Market. Encouraging and expanding this market will leverage the regional effort that is already underway. Specific needs that have been identified include access to infrastructure (processing facilities, storage, etc.), mid-to-large scale markets, and support for value-added enterprises. Ties to regional economic development work could include partnerships with the Economic Development Council, the Port of Olympia, the Northwest Agriculture Business Center, the Southwest Washington Growers Cooperative, and higher education institutions (described in more detail in Appendix C).

Thurston Conservation District

The Thurston Conservation District (TCD)¹⁰ is a non-regulatory agency that seeks out partnerships with rural, agricultural, and urban communities to conserve and protect local natural resources. In addition to their active participation in this work group, they have also participated in Thurston County's process to update their agriculture policies.

In their 2020-2025 strategic plan,¹¹ TCD includes a goal to develop a Conservation and Education Center. They have identified alignment with the high priority needs that were identified in the recent Olympia Parks survey, which are consistent with some of the goals for the Conservation and Education Center. They want this center to serve as a community resource.

In addition to that goal, the TCD Strategic Plan includes the following:

Local Food Production & Consumption (pg. 4)

Goal 6: Support urban and suburban food production.

Goal 7: Increase accessibility to healthy local food for community members of Thurston County.

Producer Support & Preservation of Working Lands (pg. 5)

Goal 8: Work with partners to protect critical working lands through easements and acquisitions.

Goal 10: Support viable farms.

Goal 13: Bridge the gap between retiring and beginning producers

Southwest Washington Food Hub

The Southwest Washington Food Hub¹² formed in 2019 by the Southwest Washington Growers Cooperative. They identified challenges around flood events, development pressure, loss of processing facilities, and diminished cooperative advantages as a threat to agriculture in our region. By collaborating on marketing, logistics, and stewardship, their goal is to increase the viability of family farms. Not only does the Food Hub create a centralized platform for individuals, businesses, and institutions to purchase directly from local farmers, they also operate a Food Security Box Program and a Direct to Food Banks Program.

¹⁰ Thurston Conservation District: <https://www.thurstoncd.com/>

¹¹ Thurston Conservation District 2021-2025 Strategic Plan: <https://www.thurstoncd.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/TCD-2020-2025-Strategic-Plan-Updated-1-21-20.pdf>

¹² Southwest Washington Food Hub: <https://swwafoodhub.com/>

Network of Community Organizations

The following organizations have been involved in various parts of the local food system. These are described in more detail in Appendix C:

- Community Farm Land Trust
- Enterprise for Equity
- Garden-Raised Bounty (GRuB)
- Haki Farmers Collective
- South Sound Food System Network
- Sustainable South Sound
- Thurston County Farm Bureau
- Thurston County Food Bank (Gleaning program)
- Union Gospel Mission (VegOut program)
- WSU Extension Thurston County

Food Justice

Racial equity and social justice are integral to the food system, given our history of agriculture and its dependence on enslavement, displacement, and farming practices that have reduced non-agrarian food systems. Justice in the food system is not only about access to nutritious food, but also access to land to grow food for either personal subsistence or to generate a livelihood. According to data from the USDA 2017 Census on Agriculture,¹³ in Thurston County, 96.6% of farmers are white, which is above the national average of 92.4%.

Young Farmers Coalition

The Young Farmers Coalition has developed a Racial Equity Toolkit¹⁴ to provide guidance, context, structure, and practical tools for convening conversations about race, racism, equity, and justice. It also contains guidance for direct actions based on resource-sharing, reparations, and movement building. The Young Farmers recently released a report titled Land Policy: Towards a More Equitable Farming Future.¹⁵ A summary of their recommendations for local jurisdictions include:

- Create a climate resiliency land bank to protect and secure sources of food, rethinking agricultural land as public infrastructure and farmers as critical employees. Purchase farmland, employ farmers, and invest in food processing infrastructure.
- Fund local farmland protection programs. Prioritize projects that protect farmland affordability and create pathways to secure land tenure for farmers, particularly BIPOC farmers.
- Limit development on prime soils, prioritize farming, and enable land access for farmers. Zone for agricultural use and create urban agriculture opportunities. Examples provided:

¹³ 2017 Census of Agriculture, Thurston County Profile, USDA:

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Washington/cp53067.pdf

¹⁴ Racial Equity Toolkit, National Young Farmers Coalition, 2020: https://www.youngfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf

¹⁵ Land Policy: Towards a More Equitable Future, National Young Farmers Coalition, 2020: <https://www.youngfarmers.org/land/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/LandPolicyReport.pdf>

- Boston, Article 89: Urban Agriculture Zoning: defines types of urban farms (ground, roof, freight container), establishes farming practices and regulations (soil safety, composting, structures, hydroponics, aquaculture, markets, animals).¹⁶
- D.C., Law 21-257: Urban Farming and Food Security: provides property tax reductions on urban land dedicated to farming and creates leasing opportunities for farmers on public-owned urban land.¹⁷
- Pittsburgh Adopt-a-Lot Program: provides site use agreements to access city-owned vacant lots for greenspace and agriculture.¹⁸
- Enact and strengthen current use tax valuation to permit taxation of agricultural land based on the actual, ongoing use of the land rather than its full market value or highest use. Incorporating minimum multi-year lease requirements into current use tax programs can help incentivize more secure tenancy for farmers.

Survey for Olympia Parks Planning Process

As part of the process for Olympia's 2022-2028 Parks, Arts, and Recreation Plan, a survey to the community included the preservation of farmland as a goal to consider. As written in the survey, respondents were asked to rank the goal to "preserve and acquire farmland to support local food, livestock, and climate mitigation." Overall, 33% of respondents were very support and 24% were somewhat supportive, while 19% were unsupportive of this priority. 28% ranked this goal as one of their top four priorities.

Demographic data was collected in the survey, some of which is summarized in the tables below. Respondents were asked if they were renter, but it is not known if they have access to a private yard. Of the renters that responded, 41% were very supportive and 23% somewhat supportive. 33% ranked it as their top priority.

Those who identified as women were more likely to be supportive (38% very supportive and 25% somewhat supportive) than those who identified as men (26% very supportive and 23% somewhat supportive). Non-binary people made up 7 of the 515 respondents. They ranked farmland preservation as either "very supportive" (86%) or "somewhat supportive" (14%).

¹⁶ Article 89 Made Easy: Urban Agriculture Zoning for the City of Boston: <https://www.pvpc.org/sites/default/files/doc-municipal-strategies-increase-food-access2594.pdf>

¹⁷ D.C. Law 21-257. Urban Farming and Food Security Amendment Act of 2016. Washington, D.C.: <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/laws/21-257.html>

¹⁸ Pittsburgh Adopt-A-Lot Program: <https://pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/adopt-a-lot>

Figure 1: Data on Race, Income, and Age from Olympia Parks, Arts, and Recreation Survey

Race	Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Unsure	Opposed	Top Four Priority
Asian or Asian Indian	25.0%	22.2%	36.1%	16.7%	16.7%
Black or African American	33.3%	25.0%	16.7%	25.0%	33.3%
White	32.8%	24.3%	24.5%	18.4%	28.2%
Hispanic, Spanish, or Latinx	26.1%	30.4%	21.7%	21.7%	17.4%
Other	50.0%	16.7%	22.2%	11.1%	38.9%

*In the crosstab data for the survey report appendix, “other” includes American Indian or Alaskan Native, Slavic/Eastern European, Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, unknown, prefer to self-describe, and prefer not to say.

Income	Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Unsure	Opposed	Top Four Priority
Income less than \$20k	55.9%	26.5%	17.6%	0.0%	47.1%
\$20k – 35k	50.0%	16.7%	22.2%	11.1%	47.2%
\$35k – 50k	42.6%	23.0%	16.4%	18.0%	41.0%
\$50k – 75k	36.8%	23.0%	21.8%	18.4%	34.5%
\$75k – 100k	25.7%	24.3%	27.1%	22.9%	22.9%
\$100k - \$130k	25.4%	27.0%	27.0%	20.6%	17.5%
\$130k+	21.3%	18.0%	36.1%	24.6%	14.8%

Age	Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Unsure	Opposed	Top Four Priority
18-34 years	47.2%	24.7%	11.2%	16.9%	39.3%
35-44 years	34.7%	35.1%	26.7%	25.2%	29.7%
45-54 years	35.1%	24.7%	17.8%	27.0%	23.7%
55-64 years	26.7%	17.8%	33.7%	21.8%	24.8%
65 years and older	25.2%	27.0%	27.9%	19.8%	23.4%

Local Conversations

As the nation has moved forward with a revived movement for racial justice, conversations in our local community have evolved to more deeply incorporate racial justice into all aspects of our work in the community. Statements have been created by local organizations further committing themselves to racial justice in their work, including GRuB¹⁹ and the Community Farm Land Trust.²⁰ Some ideas that have come up in Olympia for incorporating racial justice into the local food system include:

- Creating land stewardship opportunities for the recently created Haki Farmers Collective.²¹ From their website: “Haki means Justice in Swahili – a widely spoken language in Africa. Haki Farmers collective seeks to bolster and reincorporate traditional and inherently sustainable farming knowledge that is present in our migrant and indigenous communities. By holding close decolonization frameworks, Haki seeks to encourage people of color, including indigenous

¹⁹ GRuB Solidarity Statement, June 5, 2020: <https://www.goodgrub.org/post/grub-solidarity-statement>

²⁰ Statement of Solidarity, Community Farm Land Trust: <https://www.communityfarmlandtrust.org/statement-of-solidarity.html>

²¹ Haki Farmers Collective: <https://hakifarmers.org/>

peoples and the black descendants of American slavery, to reclaim life-giving knowledge of sustainable farming and plant medicine creation.”

- Support the creation of farm-based recovery and reentry programs for people exiting incarceration that include paid job training opportunities and supportive, stable housing that exist within a restorative framework.
- The Squaxin Island Tribe operates the Salish Roots Farm²² on a 10-acre parcel in the Kamilche Valley. The Nisqually Tribe operates the Nisqually Community Garden,²³ which sits on 70 acres of open land overlooking the restored estuary. Both Tribes have Usual and Accustomed areas in Thurston County and have an interest in self-sufficiency, food sovereignty, and the restoration of indigenous food sources.

Active and Potential Farmland

The first task undertaken by this work group was to determine how much farmland remains in Olympia and the UGA. The Olympia Farmland Analysis Report is included with much more detail in Appendix A. This task was carried out through a GIS analysis conducted by Adam Peterson at the Thurston Conservation District. He studied the inventory of agricultural land that is actively being farmed or could be brought into production. The initial data sources include:

- Agricultural Land Use GIS Layer (Washington State Department of Agriculture)
- Current Use Agriculture Program (Thurston County)
- 2020 Farm Map (Community Farm Land Trust)
- Organic INTEGRITY Database (United States Department of Agriculture - USDA)

An aerial imagery analysis was also conducted to identify any gaps and potential agriculture land. Data from the National Agricultural Imagery Program from USDA and ESRI Basemap Imagery, and Google Earth and Google Street View if additional context was needed. Potential agriculture was identified as land 1 acre or larger, either with the same owner or adjacent to active farmland, clear of trees and native woody brush, pavement, development, wetlands, stream and water body buffers (30 feet), steep slopes, parks, planned developments where infrastructure already exists, zoning areas that do not permit agriculture, and other barriers. Active agriculture was identified with the presence of barns, livestock, row crops, greenhouses, orchards, hay bales or mow lines.

Figure 2: Total acres of active and potential agriculture in Olympia and the Urban Growth Area

	Active Agriculture	Potential Agriculture	Total Agriculture
Olympia	151.9 acres	69.1 acres	221 acres
Olympia UGA	123.3 acres	105.3 acres	228.6 acres
Olympia + Olympia UGA	275.2 acres	174.4 acres	449.6 acres

The quality of this farmland was assessed using the USDA National Resource Conservation Service Farmland Classification. It was found that almost all these acres are considered prime farmland, all but

²² Salish Roots Farm, Squaxin Island Tribe: <https://squaxinland.org/community/salish-roots/>

²³ Nisqually Community Garden, Nisqually Indian Tribe: <http://www.nisqually-nsn.gov/index.php/administration/tribal-services/community-services/community-garden-program/>

0.7 acres. It is noted in the report that 142.2 acres were classified as “prime farmland if irrigated,” which indicates a need to have access to water, depending on the type of agriculture.

An analysis of land ownership was also conducted. In the city, 92.9% of the total acreage is privately owned. Nonprofits hold 5.4% and 0.8% is public. In the UGA, 75.2% is privately owned, 19.4% publicly owned, and 5.4% nonprofit owned. An assessment of land values was also conducted, which may be useful in informing the recommendations of the work group. That is described in detail in the report in Appendix A.

Farm-Friendly Checklist

To get acquainted with the current landscape for supporting farmland and food systems, we reviewed the Farm-Friendly Checklist provided by the American Farmland Trust. The complete checklist with more context can be found in Appendix B. We identified the following:

- The city currently charges a higher rate for irrigation between July 1 and October 31. A discounted rate for water used for agricultural can remove a significant barrier.
- Food waste is collected for low-density residential with the curbside yard waste bin. There is no larger scale program for restaurants, higher-density multi-family housing, or institutions. The Thurston County Food Bank offers a gleaning program.
- Goals for farmland and local food are outlined in Comprehensive Plan but lack a strategy for implementation. The Sustainable Thurston Plan, Climate Mitigation Plan, and Climate Adaptation Plan all have goals and strategies related to agriculture and food production.
- There is not currently support for agricultural leadership at the city. There are opportunities to coordinate with the Thurston County Agriculture advisory committee, create a city-specific advisory group, and engage in other regional work.
- Public land is provided for farming and food production with the lease to Spooner’s Farm and two sites for community gardens. More could be done to acquire public farmland and expand food production on city-owned land.
- Connections between agriculture and residents are encouraged with the City’s ownership of the Farmer’s Market. This can be expanded (i.e. the Creative District, economic development, etc.).
- A look at the active and potential farmland inventory, compared to areas that are not conducive to development, could identify areas that could be zoned for agriculture.
- Could explore options to purchase conservation easements or otherwise preserve farmland in the UGA.
- A Transfer of Development Rights program exists but has had very little success and should be evaluated. There is no mitigation ordinance to protect farmland, that could be explored.
- A “right-to-farm” policy should be considered with annexation of the UGA.
- Check to see if the Open Space and Agriculture Property Programs in Thurston County apply in the UGA. Their program is currently limited to a minimum of 20 acres and could be reduced to support small farms.
- Agriculture is allowed as primary or secondary use in most zoning districts. There is no specific ordinance for urban agriculture but could be considered for a more comprehensive approach.
- There are no voluntary districts where agriculture is encouraged and protected. There has been interest in forming an Eco-District in Olympia.

- Agricultural animals are permitted with conditions in most zoning districts. They should be evaluated to see if they are too restrictive, considering the option for site management plans to permit activities.
- For direct consumer sales, produce grown on site in Olympia may be sold on site. We could consider ways Olympia can support regional agritourism.
- The City supports market infrastructure with ownership of the Olympia Farmers Market. The West Side Farmers Market is permitted on a private park. More market opportunities could be supported with the Southwest Washington Food Hub.
- Value-added processing is permitted in industrial districts. This could be expanded to support cottage industries. A community commercial kitchen could support local food entrepreneurs.
- Farm-to-school programs exist (School District, GRuB, etc.). The City could support this work.
- There are no buy-local campaigns at the City for local food. There are campaigns to support downtown businesses. Could support distribution of Community Farm Land Trust Farm Map to households and businesses. Could also work to connect businesses and institutions to the Southwest Washington Food Hub.

Thurston County Agriculture Survey

As this work has been progressing at the City of Olympia, Thurston County has been in the process of conducting a community-driven review of their policies and programs related to agriculture. This is part of their 2020-2021 docket for Comprehensive Plan amendments., looking specifically at land use policies and zoning, incentive programs, and regulatory programs. This work is being done in coordination with the county Agriculture Advisory Committee. They plan to bring their recommendations to their Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners between August and December in 2021.

As part of this work, the County conducted the Thurston County Agriculture Survey,²⁴ which includes top policies ranked by participants. Four issues rose to the top of their survey results:

- **Outreach and Education:** Room for more education and outreach from the county to farmers and community. Farmers and non-farmers have a low level of familiarity with existing policies and programs to support farmland preservation.
- **Policy Changes:** More policy work is needed to preserve farmland – with two policies generating the most interest:
 - Zoning changes to include more acres being protected, including smaller farms.
 - Consider the impact to farmland when the county reviews development applications.
- **Incentive programs:** Explore options to adopt changes to improve these three programs: Open Space, Conservation Futures, Transfer of Development Rights.
- **Economic Development:** Connect farmers to markets and strengthen infrastructure for processing raw food products.

While some of this work is very specific to the County, there are clear connections and partnerships to be made with the City. One example is the strengthening of the Transfer of Development Rights program, which was evaluated by the Thurston Regional Planning Council.²⁵ Challenges for this

²⁴ Thurston County Agriculture Survey Results: <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/planning/planningdocuments/Thurston-Agriculture-Survey.pdf>

²⁵ Transfer of Development Rights, TRPC: https://www.trpc.org/DocumentCenter/View/2281/Transfer_of_Development_Rights

program have been a lack of demand for increased density in the urban area and a resistance to higher-density projects in neighborhoods.

Review of Other Cities and Counties

A review of tools used by other Washington cities and counties for farmland preservation was conducted. This also included a city in California, which has a unique approach to mitigation.

Bainbridge Island	Bainbridge Island has a Public Farming Program. ²⁶ The City signed a 30-year lease with a nonprofit called Friends of the Farms for them to maintain and improve 60 acres of public farmland. The City provides financial operating support for the organization. Friends of the Farms provides the city with an annual report.
Federal Way	A chapter in their code is specifically for urban agriculture. ²⁷ This includes sections on community gardens and urban farms, farmers markets, farm stands, cottage food operations, accessory structures, and on-site sales. Community gardens and urban farms are permitted in any zone with an approved site management plan.
Kent	<p>Agriculture districts were created through zoning to concentrate agricultural uses and protect long-term agriculture.²⁸ These include:</p> <p>A-10: “The stated goal of the city is to preserve prime agricultural land in the Green River Valley as a nonrenewable resource. The agriculture zone shall actively encourage the concentration of agricultural uses in areas where incompatibility with urban uses will be minimal to aid in the implementation of those goals. Further, such classification of prime agricultural land thus recognizes and encourages farming activity as a viable sector of the local economy.”</p> <p>AG: “The purpose of the AG zone is to provide appropriate locations for agriculturally related industrial and retail uses in or near areas designated for long-term agricultural use. Such areas may contain prime farmland soils which may be currently or potentially used for agricultural production.”</p> <p>This provides for 277 acres of exclusive agriculture use, much of which is adjacent to protected farmland in unincorporated King County. This is one of five Agriculture Production Districts created in King County in 1985.^{29 30}</p>
Redmond	<p>Transfer of Development Rights program protects critical areas within the city (habitat, wetlands, steep slopes, streams - does not include agriculture).³¹</p> <p>Development regulations address compatible use and required notice to neighboring properties when new development is going in near agricultural uses.</p>
King County	The Farmland Preservation Program was established by voters in 1979 to preserve farmland by acquiring development rights.

²⁶ Public Farmland, Bainbridge Island: <https://www.bainbridgewa.gov/1182/Public-Farmland>

²⁷ Urban Agriculture, Federal Way, Chapter 19.262: <https://www.codepublishing.com/WA/FederalWay/html/FederalWay19/FederalWay19262.html>

²⁸ Districts Established - Zoning Map, Kent, Chapter 15.03: <https://www.codepublishing.com/WA/Kent/html/Kent15/Kent1503.html>

²⁹ Protected Farmland Map, King County: <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/dnrp/wlr/sections-programs/rural-regional-services-section/agriculture-program/farmland-preservation-program/farm-area-map.aspx>

³⁰ Lower Green River Valley Agricultural Production District is one of five King County ADPs designated on April 8, 1985, HistoryLink: <https://www.historylink.org/File/20697>

³¹ Transfer of Development Rights, Redmond: <https://www.redmond.gov/642/Transfer-of-Development-Rights>

	<p>Transfer of Developments Rights program supports agriculture, forestry, critical wildlife habitat, open space, and regional trail connectors or urban separators.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TDR Marketplace uses five factors to establish the value. Prices vary depending on conditions in sending and receiving areas and inform the TDR Exchange where rights can be bought and sold.³² • TDR partner cities include Seattle, Bellevue, Sammamish, Issaquah, and Normandy Park. There are also additional urban receiving areas. • Non-density uses and benefits: Reduction in property taxes, satisfaction of traffic concurrency requirements, rural TDRs for building larger ADUs. • Sightline studied the King County TDR program for climate impacts and found a benefit when higher density in the urban area was achieved.³³ • From 1998 to 2019, over 144,500 acres of Rural and Resource Lands have been protected through this program by relocating 2,900 potential dwellings into urban areas.³⁴ <p>King County also offers several programs and resources to support farms, including technical assistance, developing food pipelines, drainage assistance, salmon safety certification, farm link, farmers market support, and more.</p>
Whatcom County	Purchase of Development Rights program started in 2001. ³⁵ Agriculture district zoning enables parcel reconfiguration to preserve more farmland between multiple parcels by clustering residential development.
Skagit County	Purchase of Development Rights program, called the Farmland Legacy Program, was established in 1996. ³⁶
Davis, CA	<p>One of the first farmland mitigation programs in 1995.³⁷ This ordinance requires developers to permanently protect one acre of farmland for every acre of agricultural land they convert to other uses. Developers can place an agricultural conservation easement on farmland in another part of the city or pay a fee to satisfy mitigation. Also mandates a 150-foot buffer for development adjacent to agriculture land.</p> <p>Voters passed an Open Space Protection tax in 2000 to provide revenue for farmland preservation. An initiative was also passed in 2000 that establishes a right for the electorate to vote to approve conversion of land from agricultural to urban uses.</p>

³² King County TDR Marketplace: <https://kingcounty.gov/services/environment/stewardship/sustainable-building/transfer-development-rights/market-info.aspx>

³³ Transfer of Development Rights: a tool for reducing climate-warming emissions: <https://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/tdr/sightline-tdr-report-08-2011.pdf>

³⁴ King County Transfer of Development Rights: <https://kingcounty.gov/services/environment/stewardship/sustainable-building/transfer-development-rights/market-info.aspx>

³⁵ Whatcom County Purchase of Development Rights Program: <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/573/Purchase-of-Development-Rights-Oversight> or <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/2a898f0e6d9b46c788b7463b3cb7f45a>

³⁶ Skagit Farmland Legacy Program: <https://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/NRFarmLegacy>

³⁷ Open Space Program Policy Framework, Davis, California: <https://www.cityofdavis.org/city-hall/community-development-and-sustainability/open-space-program/policy-framework>

Recommendations

After convening for a year, the Olympia Farmland Work Group has researched the above topics and brings forward the following recommendations for the Land Use and Environment Committee:

1. Bring racial justice to the front and center of food sovereignty. Support disadvantaged farmers with access to urban and peri-urban³⁸ agricultural land and resources.
2. If the loss of Spooner's Farm cannot be prevented, replace the acreage of lost farmland within city-owned public lands with emphasis on larger acre parcels.
3. Continue and expand participation in the Olympia Farmland Working Group to link "no net loss" to the Comprehensive Plan strategy to: *"Collaborate with community partners to ensure that everyone within Olympia is within biking or walking distance of a place to grow food."* Build on the mapping analysis conducted by the Thurston Conservation District to identify areas where this goal is not being met (example: New Haven, CT³⁹). Assess areas where existing permitted and exempt wells can be used for agricultural purposes, as well as areas where reclaimed water is currently piped. Bring recommendations forward by summer of 2022, in time for consideration in the 2023 budget. Assess the following strategies:
 - a. Inclusion of farmland in the plan for Parks acquisition
 - b. Evaluation of city-owned land for food production
 - c. Establish funding source for conservation and development of agricultural land
 - d. Assess opportunities for tax incentives (ex. Open Space)
 - e. A citywide Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program
 - f. Zoning for agriculture
 - g. Mitigation of loss of farmland through SEPA
4. Upon completion of the work of the Olympia Farmland Working Group, establish a Local Food Advisory Committee to develop a plan to implement the strategies and vision related to food in the Comprehensive Plan. Examples of municipal food plans and production can be found in Appendix D.
5. Refer to the Utility Advisory Commission the lowering of rates for irrigation for agricultural purposes. Include an exploration with LOTT on reclaimed water for food production.
6. Participate in regional work to protect agricultural land throughout Thurston County, including the upcoming TDR summit.
7. Include the food system in the Covid-19 economic recovery by supporting urban markets and cottage industries for local food, agritourism, a community kitchen that includes processing equipment, and career development.

³⁸ "The food and agriculture organization of the United Nations defines peri-urban agriculture as the agriculture practices within and around cities that compete for resources (land, water, energy, labor) that could also serve other purposes to satisfy the requirements of the urban population." From *Understanding Peri-Urban Agriculture*, TUGI:

<https://www.theurbangardeninitiative.org/blog/understanding-peri-urban-agriculture>

³⁹ New Haven's Urban Agriculture: <https://due-parsons.github.io/methods3-fall2017/projects/new-haven-s-urban-agriculture/>