

Appendix A: Methodology

AFT evaluated four factors in rating farmland protection programs in each of the twelve counties that comprise the Puget Sound region: regulation, development rights, tax relief, and economic development. The analysis was based largely on information on each county's website, including county zoning, land use regulations, economic development programs, and tax incentives. All twelve counties have websites with sufficient information to support this analysis.

This information was augmented by selective interviews with county officials to confirm or add detail to the online material. To fill in gaps of missing information, nonprofit organizations such as land trusts and conservation districts were also consulted.

A scorecard was then completed for each county, using the criteria and scoring described further in this document. County scores were compiled in a master scorecard to examine the state of farmland conservation regionally and develop the project findings and recommendations.

Regulation (maximum for category: 66 points)

THE FOLLOWING FACTORS WERE EVALUATED IN THIS CATEGORY:

Percentage of farmland in the county's agriculture zone (maximum 20 points):

The amount of county farmland within a county's agricultural zone is critical to protecting farmland into the future, as research indicates that these zones generally have the most restrictive set of allowable uses and a lowest base densities. The point scale was as follows:

- » > 59% of farmland in agricultural zones = 20 points
- » 40-59% of farmland in agricultural zones = 10 points
- » 20-39% of farmland in agricultural zones = 5 points
- » < 20% of farmland in agricultural zones = 0 points

The total acreage of farmland within the county's agricultural zone was supplied by the planning department in each county. If the county had multiple agricultural zones, the total acreage for those zones was combined. For this study, all acres in a county's agricultural zone were assumed to be dedicated to agricultural production.

The total acreage in the agricultural zone was then divided by the total amount of farmland within the county as reported by the 2007 USDA Agricultural Census. The Census defines a farm as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced or sold or normally would have been sold during the Census year. Data is self-reported by landowners.

The researchers sought a secondary source to confirm the extent of farmland and found that mapping available from the state (specifically from the Washington Department of Ecology) includes only the farmland designated in county agricultural zones. This significantly undercounts farmland when compared to the 2007 Agricultural Census and to the researcher's analysis of aerial photography. This is a significant shortcoming.

Regulations within the zone with the most farmland (maximum 23 points):

The researchers evaluated characteristics of the county zone that contained the most farmland. This analysis was accomplished by a visual examination comparing satellite photos of each county (available through Google Earth) with the county zoning or comprehensive plan maps. Note that this required judgment, particularly when several zoning classifications appeared to have roughly the same amount of farmland. Often but not always, the county's agricultural zone was judged to have the highest percentage of the county's farmland.

The residential density was evaluated within that zone. Each county code establishes a base residential density for each of its zoning categories, generally expressed as the number of acres required for each dwelling unit. If the county had multiple density agricultural zones, the most prevalent density was used. The point scale was as follows:

- » 1 dwelling unit in > 39 acres = 15 points
- » 1 dwelling unit in 20-39 acres ac = 10 points
- » 1 dwelling unit in 10-19 acres = 5 points
- » 1 dwelling unit in 5-9 acres = 1 point
- » 1 dwelling unit in 0-4 acres = 0 points

Allowable uses were also considered. County zoning generally establishes which uses are permitted outright within a zone, permitted conditionally, and prohibited. As the report indicates, the ideal is for zoning to allow agriculture and agriculturally compatible uses (such as farm stands and food processing facilities) only. The point scale was as follows:

	MOST NON-AG USES PERMITTED OUTRIGHT	MOST NON-AG USES UNDER CONDITIONAL PERMITS
AGRICULTURE AND AG-RELATED USES ONLY		8
LIMITED NUMBER OF NON-AGRICULTURAL USES	4	6
EXTENSIVE NUMBER OF NON-AGRICULTURAL USES	0	2

The distinction between a "limited" number and an "extensive" number of non-agricultural uses was necessarily subjective, given the wide variability among counties in how allowable uses are defined. Many counties identified different sets of allowable uses in their lists and footnoted conditional uses extensively, while others were far less detailed and prescriptive.

Regulations within the zone with the next most agricultural land (maximum 14 points):

Because farmland is often categorized in multiple zones, the zone with the second largest amount of farmland was also evaluated. The methods used were the same as for the regulations within the zone with the most amount of farmland, but the scoring was modified as follows.

THE POINT SCALE FOR DENSITY WAS CHANGED TO THE FOLLOWING:

- » 1 dwelling unit in > 39 acres = 10 points
- » 1 dwelling unit in 20-39 acres ac = 7 points
- » 1 dwelling unit in 10-19 acres = 4 points
- » 1 dwelling unit in 5-9 acres = 1 point
- » 1 dwelling unit in 0-4 acres = 0 points

THE POINT SCALE FOR ALLOWABLE USES WAS CHANGED TO THE FOLLOWING:

	MOST NON-AG USES PERMITTED OUTRIGHT	MOST NON-AG USES UNDER CONDITIONAL PERMITS
AGRICULTURE AND AG-RELATED USES ONLY		4
LIMITED NUMBER OF NON-AGRICULTURAL USES	2	3
EXTENSIVE NUMBER OF NON-AGRICULTURAL USES	0	1

Contiguity (maximum 6 points):

This analysis evaluated the contiguity of farmland parcels in the county’s agricultural zone. Contiguity was evaluated because large blocks of farmland are easier to protect than an equivalent amount of dispersed farmland. This was evaluated through a visual analysis of aerial photography and the county’s zoning or comprehensive plan map, with points allocated according to the following subjective scale.

- » High (6 points): Most farmland is zoned in large blocks of agricultural zoning.
- » Medium (3 points): Farmland is split between large blocks and dispersed parcels.
- » Low (0 points): Farmland is zoned in dispersed parcels and not blocks.

Mitigation policy (3 pts):

Farmland mitigation policy normally take the form of “an acre for an acre” requirement that mandates that one or more acres of farmland is protected for every acre disturbed or developed. This factor was evaluated based on a review of county zoning policy, with counties having a mitigation policy given 3 points.

Development Rights (maximum for category: 38 points)

This analysis evaluated Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs on the county level. Information was collected through online sources and interviews with county officials and staff. The following factors were evaluated in this category:

Presence/absence of a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program (3 points):

Counties with a PDR program were given 3 points regardless of the level or timing of activity.

Presence of a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program (3 points):

Counties with a TDR program were given 3 points regardless of the level or timing of activity.

PDR/TDR Acreage (maximum 26 points):

The acreage in each county's PDR and TDR programs was evaluated based on interviews with program staff. Points were awarded as follows:

- » > 10,000 acres protected in either or both programs = 20 points
- » 5,000-10,000 acres protected in either or both programs = 15 points
- » 1,000-4,999 acres protected in either or both programs = 10 points
- » < 1,000 acres protected in either or both programs = 5 points
- » No acreage protected = 0 points

The vintage of PDR/TDR acreage was also evaluated to recognize programs with recent activity, with the following points awarded:

- » Majority of purchases/transfers within the last 5 years = 3 points
- » Majority of purchases/transfers within 6-10 years = 2 points
- » Majority of purchases/transfers within 10+ years = 1 point

To recognize cases where PDR or TDR is required as a condition of regulation, an additional 3 points was awarded to counties that had such requirements.

Utilization of local funding sources (maximum 6 points):

This factor evaluates the extent to which local governments use the Conservation Futures Tax for farmland PDR and TDR programs. This tax is the most frequently used local funding source for farmland protection and is available to all Washington counties. Points were awarded as follows:

- » The county dedicates Conservation Futures Tax revenues to farmland protection (6 points)
- » The county has contributed a substantial amount of CFT funds to farmland protection (4 points)
- » The county has occasionally funded farmland protection with CFT funds (2 points)
- » The county doesn't have a CFT fund or hasn't used it for farmland protection (0 points)

Property Tax Relief (maximum for category: 10 points)

THE FOLLOWING FACTOR WAS EVALUATED IN THIS CATEGORY:

Percentage of agricultural acreage enrolled in the Current Use Taxation program:

The Current Use Taxation program is available to all counties under state law and enrollment of farmland provides the owner with substantial reductions in property tax. The percentage of farmland enrolled was calculated by dividing the total acres of farmland enrolled in Current Use Tax programs (as identified by the Assessors office in each county) by the total acreage of farmland in the county according to the 2007 USDA Agricultural Census. Points were awarded as follows:

- » > 70% of county farmland enrolled in CUT = 10 points
- » 40-70% of county farmland enrolled in CUT = 5 points
- » < 40 of county farmland enrolled in CUT = 0 points

Economic Development (maximum for category: 16 points)

The analysis of each county's economic development programs for farmers consisted of a review of online materials followed by interviews with relevant county staff. The following factors were evaluated in this category:

Assistance with direct marketing and other business assistance (4 points):

This analysis identified programs or events that the county helps to sponsor that either aid in direct marketing initiatives or business assistance and planning to farmers. For instance, some counties help organize farm tours and agritourism projects, provide support with farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture programs, and/or launch county-wide branding initiatives for local agriculture. Four points were awarded to counties with substantial efforts in this realm.

Regulatory assistance (4 points):

This evaluation identifies county assistance to farmers to address permitting and licensing requirements. Some counties offer clear website materials dedicated to navigating regulation, while others have a specific staff person that can be contacted about agricultural permitting. Four points were awarded to counties with substantial efforts to assist with regulatory compliance.

Ombudsman/liaison assistance (4 points):

This analysis looks at whether counties have people identified to serve as intermediaries between county government and the farm community, either through the designation of a formal ombudsman or, more frequently, through an ag advisory committee or similar group. Four points were awarded to counties with substantial efforts to provide an intermediary for the farm community.

Strategic planning (4 points):

This assessment considers whether each county has a strategic plan for the future of farming and retention of farmland. The plan could be developed by the county itself or by an ag commission reporting to the county. Four points were awarded to counties with substantial strategic planning efforts.