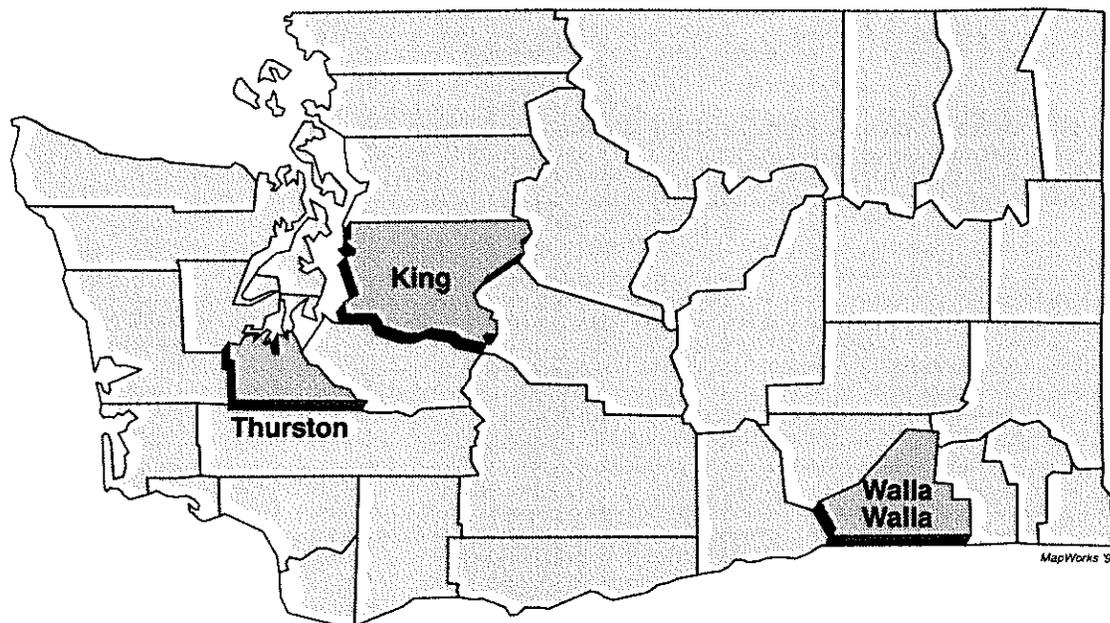


SECTION TWO: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

CHAPTER 10: WASHINGTON CASE STUDY

MAP 10.1: WASHINGTON CASE STUDY COUNTIES



STATE AND COUNTY
FARMLAND PROTECTION
PROGRAMS IN
WASHINGTON

Washington has many unique climates and soils, allowing Washington farmers to produce a wide variety of agricultural commodities. The state is the nation's top producer of apples, pears, Concord grapes, sweet cherries, raspberries and hops, and is a leading producer of wheat, potatoes and vegetables. Farmland currently accounts for approximately 37 percent of the state's land base¹, and the total value of agricultural commodities was more than \$5 billion in 1994².

Washington is also a very desirable place to live. The Puget Sound region in the northwest corner of the state is famous for its scenic shorelines, ancient forests and snow-capped peaks. The region's spectacular natural beauty and an economy fueled by economic giants Microsoft and Boeing have drawn hundreds of thousands of newcomers to the state over the past 25 years—Washington's population increased by 59 percent between 1970 and 1995. This rapid population growth has had dramatic impacts on farmland and agriculture.

Washington lost approximately 23,800 acres of farmland each year between 1970 and 1980. A 1979 study predicted that the fast-growing Puget Sound region could lose between 20 and 27 percent of its remaining farmland by the year 2000³. The region gained more than 600,000 residents between 1980 and 1990, accounting for nearly 83 percent of Washington's total population growth over the decade. While the state's population increased by 17.8 percent during the 1980s, growth in the 10 Puget Sound counties ranged from 18.7 percent to 37.9 percent⁴.

In the 1970s, King County and Whitman County developed strategies to protect farmland and support agriculture. Located at opposite ends of the state, the two counties could not be much more different. King County, which includes the city of Seattle, is the state's most populous county. The climate is wet and much of the agricultural land is most suitable for pasture. By 1975, urbanization had consumed two-thirds of the county's farmland base and agriculture was in decline. In contrast, Whitman County, located on the Idaho border, is almost exclusively agricultural. The county encompasses more than 1.3 million acres of farmland in a region known as the Palouse. Dryland wheat is the primary crop cultivated in the Palouse, which is one of the most fertile regions of the world. Washington State University provides virtually all of the non-agricultural jobs in Whitman County.

The two counties developed farmland protection strategies that were tailored to meet their different needs. King County's Farmland Preservation Program, approved by voters in 1979, provided public funds for PACE. Whitman County's 1978 Comprehensive Plan established exclusive agricultural protection zoning covering 95 percent of its land area. The APZ ordinance made it extremely difficult to develop productive farmland for non-agricultural use.

Other Washington counties tried to address the challenges facing farmers during the same period. By 1985, 32 of the state's 39 counties reported using at least one strategy to protect farmland, and two other counties were considering farmland protection programs. Thurston County's 1976 Comprehensive Plan identified the need to investigate PACE and TDR. Spokane County called for an exclusive agricultural zone in its 1981 Comprehensive Plan. Island County authorized a TDR program in 1984. None of these strategies, however, were fully implemented.

In 1985, a group of researchers surveyed Washington county planners about farmland protection programs. Planners in 21 counties reported that farmland protection efforts were moderately successful. Five counties reported highly successful farmland protection programs, and five planners responded that their counties' efforts to protect farmland were unsuccessful. Planners reported weak enforcement of land use regulations, lack of long-term solutions to the problems causing conversion of agricultural land and little political support for farmland protection⁵.

The Washington Growth Management Act and its contribution to farmland protection

The impact of population growth on natural resources and community infrastructure became a major political issue in western Washington during the late 1980s. Many residents of the Puget Sound region saw rapid population growth as a threat to forests, farmland, shorelines and quality of life. In response to public pressure from the Puget Sound area, the state legislature passed the Washington Growth Management Act in 1990. The law was strengthened by amendments in 1991. GMA changed the political and legal climate for land development and conservation in Washington and gave advocates of farmland protection powerful new planning tools.

GMA requires all counties in the state to designate important farmlands, which it defines as "agricultural lands that are not already characterized by urban growth and that have long-term significance for the commercial production of food or other agricultural products⁶." Counties must adopt regulations to ensure that "use of lands adjacent to agricultural...lands shall not interfere with the continued use, in the accustomed manner and accordance with best management practices, of these designated lands for the production of food [and] agricultural products..."⁷

The Growth Management Act also requires fast-growing counties and their incorporated areas to prepare detailed comprehensive plans. Mandatory components include a land use element, which designates areas and associated population densities for uses including agriculture, timber production, housing, commerce, industry, recreation and open space; and a rural element, which addresses the use of lands not specifically designated for agriculture, timber, mining or urban growth. County comprehensive plans must be internally consistent and consistent with the plans of their cities and all adjacent cities and counties. One of the goals guiding the development and adoption of comprehensive plans is to "[m]aintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries," and to "[e]ncourage the conservation of...productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses⁸."

Counties required to plan under GMA also are required to designate urban growth areas to accommodate projected urban growth over a 20-year period. In general, urban services will not be extended beyond the boundaries of urban growth areas. New, fully contained communities may be located outside urban growth areas if strict conditions are met; provision must be made to mitigate the impact of such developments on designated agricultural lands. Urban growth areas may not include designated agricultural lands unless the county has enacted a TDR or PACE program⁹.

GMA established a special body to resolve disputes arising under the law. Three regional Growth Planning Hearing Boards hear complaints that a state agency, county or city planning department under the act is not in compliance with its requirements. According to Steve Wells, in the Washington Department of Community Development, the three boards have heard approximately 40 complaints dealing with agricultural land.

The Growth Management Act guarantees the public the right to participate in preparing comprehensive plans. This gives advocates a new venue to argue for stronger protection of agricultural land. As of 1996, 18 of Washington's 39 counties were required to plan under GMA, including all of the Puget Sound counties. An additional 11 counties chose to prepare plans in conformance with the act.

INTRODUCTION

King County's 2,125 square miles encompass the city of Seattle and more than a dozen municipalities as well as many thousands of acres of farms and forest land. Dairy farms predominate in the eastern river valleys, and vegetables and berries are raised closer to the city. Between 1945 and 1975, urban growth consumed two-thirds of the county's farmland; active farming operations declined from 6,500 to 1,200. Public concern about the loss of King County farms was raised in the early 1970s by a successful campaign to stop the demolition of Pike Place Market, a historic public market that sells local fish, farm products and crafts in downtown Seattle.

FARMLAND PROTECTION IN KING COUNTY

A study conducted by the Puget Sound Council of Governments during the early 1970s reported that nearly 3,000 acres of King County farmland were being converted each year. In 1976, the county imposed an 18-month moratorium on development of important farmland while officials and farmers worked to create a farmland protection program. In 1979, county voters approved a \$50 million bond issue to fund the Farmland Preservation Program (FPP), the purpose of which was to "preserve the economic, aesthetic and cultural values provided by agriculture for the benefit of the citizens of King County." The county set a goal of acquiring easements on at least 10,000 acres of farmland. King County was the second local jurisdiction in the nation to approve a purchase agricultural conservation easement program.

TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

Purchase of agricultural conservation easements and agricultural protection zoning

The county targeted eight discrete geographic areas for protection and established priorities for easement purchases in these areas. The program then conducted three "Acquisition Rounds" beginning in 1984. To supplement the program and give broad protection to all farmland in the county, King County's 1985 Comprehensive Plan established Agricultural Production Districts (APDs). Zoning in the new districts allowed one dwelling unit per 10 acres in urbanized areas and one unit per 35 acres in rural areas primarily devoted to dairy production. The goal of the new zones was to maintain parcels that would be viable for

commercial agriculture and to discourage residential use of productive farmland. The APDs covered a total of approximately 40,000 acres. Virtually all of the properties enrolled in the FPP fell within the APDs.

Implementation of the FPP was delayed until 1985 due to problems with the funding source and a lawsuit. Between 1985 and 1987, King County protected 187 properties, encompassing 12,650 acres of farmland. It produced an acquisition summary that mapped all of the properties enrolled in the program. Then, at the end of 1987, the FPP was discontinued. The bond issue had not allocated funding for ongoing work on farmland preservation and the program's staff were reassigned to other tasks.

County audits of the Farmland Preservation Program

A 1988 audit of the FPP concluded that the program had met its goals, but warned that simply purchasing easements might not be sufficient to sustain agriculture in the county. In particular, the audit emphasized the need to monitor agricultural activity and land use on properties enrolled in the program. It called for annual field investigations of protected properties, record-keeping that would track landowners' compliance with the restrictive covenants and coordination with the county's Building and Land Development Department to ensure that permits would not be granted for illegal development of protected lands. In his response to the audit, the director of the Parks, Planning and Resources Department concurred with the audit's conclusions, but noted a lack of funds to develop a comprehensive monitoring program.

In 1991, the county auditor's office conducted a second audit of the FPP to follow up on the deficiencies identified by the 1988 audit and to determine whether corrective actions had been taken. Auditors met with agency personnel who had been involved with the program and visited a sample of 26 protected farms. They discovered that practically none of the recommendations made in the 1988 audit had been implemented. They found that monitoring and enforcement policies and procedures were nonexistent or insufficient and that some significant legal issues were unresolved. The auditors concluded that "while the audit found no significant violation of covenant restrictions among the sample properties reviewed...a potential for loss of acquired development rights exists¹⁰."

Auditors recommended creating a position to monitor the program and enforce protective covenants, as well as developing policies, procedures and mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement. This recommendation was implemented in 1992. Auditors also emphasized that supporting agriculture was an important component of the FPP and directed the county to advocate for farmers and promote farming and farm products.

The farmers' perspective on PACE

Farmers have mixed feelings about the effectiveness of the PACE program. Opinions seem to vary by region of the county and the extent of development pressure. Janet Baker is a dairy farmer on the Enumclaw Plateau, a predominantly agricultural area approximately 45 minutes from downtown Seattle. The FPP acquired 1,900 acres in the area; most of the properties were used for dairying. Protected farms were clustered in blocks of at least 200 acres. The Bakers sold an easement in 1986 and Janet is a strong and grateful supporter of the FPP. "The program helped stabilize the dairy industry here," she says, explaining that the program provided cash when many of the area's dairy farmers were close to bankruptcy. "We got capital when we needed it," she says. Janet can list two dozen dairy farms that have changed hands since they were protected a decade ago. She believes that 17 of these farms are still owned or leased by dairy farmers or heifer operations, and another two are being used for vegetable production. While development pressure is still a big problem, Janet believes that the FPP was a step in the right direction. She hopes the program will be renewed.

Clarissa Cross, who raises blueberries and horses in the Upper Green River Valley, is not as enthusiastic about the FPP. Selling an easement to the county allowed the Cross family to expand their operation, but the farm is now threatened by development of surrounding properties. Like most farms in the valley, the Cross' land lies along the river and is hemmed in by steep ridges. Development on the ridgecrest has caused mudslides and flooding on Clarissa's farm. One recent slide filled in the reservoir that the Crosses used for irrigation. "Now we have to irrigate with a well," Clarissa explains, "and that is expensive." She has spoken to a lawyer about the possibility of suing the developer who built the houses, but was told that she would be unlikely to recover enough money to pay the legal fees, let alone repair the damage. "This area is not conducive to farming," Clarissa claims. "It's too residential. There's too much traffic. Farming is a dying industry here¹¹."

A 1994 issue paper on farmlands and agriculture in King County reported a significant decline in agriculture since the creation of the FPP. The value of agricultural products sold in the county fell by 30 percent in real dollars between 1978 and 1992. Acres in berry production fell by 71 percent from 1978 to 1992, and acres in vegetable production dropped by 43 percent. Observers reported that a significant number of commercial farms enrolled in the FPP had been converted to hobby farms and estates. Remaining commercial farmers with land in the program reported difficulties in obtaining services, finding affordable housing for workers and complying with increasingly stringent environmental regulations¹².

Comprehensive planning

The 1994 King County Comprehensive Plan was prepared in accordance with the requirement under the Washington Growth Management Act to maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries. The plan noted that the number of acres in production had declined by 22 percent, amounting to almost 12,000 acres lost since the beginning of the FPP, and emphasized the need for renewed county action to support agriculture and protect farmland. The plan also recommended stricter zoning in Agricultural Production Districts, and established a new “no net loss of farmland” policy applying to the APDs. Policy RL-304 stated that:

Conversion to other uses should occur only when it can be demonstrated that [APD] lands are no longer suitable for agricultural purposes and that their removal will not diminish the effectiveness of farming within the Agricultural Production District boundaries. Conversion of Agricultural Production District land may only occur if mitigated through the addition of agricultural land abutting a King County Agricultural Production District of equal acreage, and of equal or greater soils and agricultural value¹³.

The Comprehensive Plan also called on county officials to protect the farmland remaining outside the APDs. It stressed the need to maintain agricultural infrastructure and minimize conflict between farmers and adjacent landowners. It recommended the establishment of an Agriculture Commission composed of commercial farmers to advise the county on programs to benefit agriculture.

Farm and Forest Report

The Agriculture Commission was convened in 1994. The county also designated “Rural Farm Study Areas” covering 6,000 acres. These areas encompassed farmland not protected by the FPP or the APDs. In 1995, King County hired a consulting team to determine how to preserve its remaining farms and forests. The team assembled citizen committees of farmers, foresters and county staff to provide information and advice to the project. They conducted surveys of all farm and forest landowners and held several public meetings. The completed Farm and Forest Report was released in 1996. The consultants found that farmers felt a “deep sense of disenfranchisement” from the county government and were opposed to further land use regulations or zoning changes. The report identified six key barriers to farming in the county:

- High cost of land;
- Low profitability of farming;
- Insufficient technical support;
- The need for better marketing and promotion;
- Regulatory requirements; and
- Population growth and conflict with farming activity¹⁴.

The Farm and Forest Report suggested more than 25 different strategies to revitalize King County agriculture. The report followed the recommendations of farmers that strategies be based on incentives rather than regulation. The first strategy on the list was to acquire additional easements on key farmlands. The report recommended that new acquisitions be targeted to fill in gaps between the properties already preserved, and suggested two revisions to the old FPP. First, to encourage productive use of land in the program, new applicants should be required to submit a plan for how farming would continue on their land in the future. Second, to prevent the sale of farmland to non-farmers, the county should be granted the first option to acquire preserved properties at their appraised agricultural value.

The Farm and Forest Report recommended a comprehensive approach to addressing the barriers facing the county's farmers. To address the high cost of land, it suggested that the county develop tax incentives and cost-sharing programs to help make farming more economically viable. To help new farmers gain access to land, skills and information, it recommended the creation of farm link and mentoring programs. Farm link programs connect farmers who are looking for land with retiring farmers who want to keep their land in agriculture but do not have heirs who wish to farm. In some cases, the retiring farmers work with and train beginning farmers to take over the farming operation. The report also called on the county to support agricultural marketing initiatives and revise regulations to decrease the time and cost involved in getting building permits for farm-related structures. More technical assistance could help farmers lower costs and protect natural resources. Finally, a county right-to-farm ordinance could help farmers who were experiencing conflicts with neighbors¹⁵.

Agricultural marketing

King County does not have a formal agricultural marketing program like some of the other case study counties, but local farmers and other residents are using creative strategies to sell farm products. Pike Place Market is open every day and houses dozens of farm stands. The market is a vibrant presence in downtown Seattle. Farmers' markets have sprung up in other parts of the city over the past decade.

Today, Indochinese immigrants are helping to revitalize King County's agricultural sector. During the 1980s, refugees from Southeast Asia settled in the Seattle metropolitan area. The newcomers were displaced by war from farming communities in their home countries. Community groups set up to assist the refugees found that few had any formal education or

job training, but many were experienced farmers. In 1984, the Interim Community Development Association set up the Indochinese Farmers Cooperative on a piece of county-owned farmland in the suburb of Woodenville. The cooperative provided several families with land and training to become market gardeners.

The Indochinese farmers are now an established presence at Pike Place Market and the neighborhood farmers' market near the University of Washington. A few families have moved from the project's land in Woodenville to lease their own land in the county. One family has purchased property, and several others continue to farm on county land in Woodenville. Interim Community Development Association staff person Leslie Morishita reports that there has been "an explosion of interest in farming in the Indochinese community" in the past few years. She estimates that there are now 40 Indochinese families trying to make a living from market gardening in the county. The scarcity of affordable land for lease or sale is a major barrier to these entrepreneurs becoming independent. Morishita and other people who work in the community encourage the refugee farmers to contact the county about the availability of land enrolled in the Farmland Preservation Program¹⁶.

Community Supported Agriculture is another new marketing approach in King County. CSA farmers sell shares of their harvest to subscribers at the beginning of the year. The subscribers receive weekly shares of produce and animal products throughout the growing season. The concept is popular because it reduces risk for farmers—they get paid at the beginning of the year, regardless of the weather—and consumers receive high-quality farm products at a reasonable cost.

King County Agriculture Commission member Bob Gregson and his wife Bonnie have a small CSA farm on Vashon Island in Puget Sound. Island Meadow Farm is small even by metropolitan farm standards—the Gregsons cultivate less than two acres—but it nets more than \$30,000 per year and provides most of the couple's income. The Gregsons raise chickens for eggs and meat and grow a variety of vegetables, fruits and nuts. Approximately one-third of their products are marketed to subscribers; the rest are sold through a farmstand, the Vashon farmers' market or wholesale to customers on the island¹⁷.

The Gregsons believe that their small, intensive operation represents the future of farming in King County. "We're reinventing something here," Bob says. "We're not going to be rebuilding the farming institution as it was. We have to find something new that works." "The big question," adds Bonnie, "is how you can make farming economic on the urban fringe. We think we've found a solution here. We make a better living here than most people do on 400- or 500-acre farms¹⁸." The Gregsons always have a waiting list for subscriptions, and they published a booklet in response to the requests they received for information on how to start a similar operation¹⁹.

CSA farms may be especially compatible with urban development. Farmer Martha Goodlet rents two acres of land for her CSA farm from a retired dairy farmer who sold an easement to the county in the 1980s. One of Goodlet's subscribers is the developer of a residential community on the ridge above the farm. In 1996, he purchased 14 shares of the farm's harvest to distribute to homeowners as an amenity. Eventually, he hopes that they will buy their own shares. Martha likes the concept, because it gives her the opportunity to educate suburban homeowners about agriculture and the needs of farmers²⁰.

There is even evidence that community supported agriculture can help protect farmland. The fate of a CSA farm in King County's Sammamish River Valley was in doubt when the owner of the property, who had been leasing it to a farmer, announced his intention to sell the land. The shareholders contributed money and worked with a land trust to help the farmer purchase the land.

LESSONS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

LeRoy Jones, who managed the King County Farmland Preservation Program during the 1980s, gets tired of hearing from the program's critics. "People criticize [the FPP] because it hasn't preserved the activity of farming," Jones explains, "but the purpose of the program was to preserve the soil—and it's still there. Now what we need to do is to make agriculture the most attractive use of the land."

Jones emphasizes the successes of the FPP. The program prevented the construction of large-scale residential developments on more than 12,000 acres of agricultural land. Most of the protected properties are still being used for some form of farming. But recent residential and commercial construction around some of this land has caused erosion and flooding that may make farming impossible. Development pressure continues to be a serious challenge to King County farmers. The 1996 Farm and Forest Report recommended a comprehensive, incentive-based approach to supporting agriculture and protecting farmland. The future of agriculture in the county may depend on the extent to which these recommendations are implemented.

The history of the King County PACE program illustrates the need for communities to take a strategic and comprehensive approach to farmland protection. Simply protecting land from development will not ensure the continuation of agriculture if market or regulatory pressures are driving farmers out. In high-priced land markets near cities, wealthy urban residents who want to purchase property for estates may outbid farmers for land that has been protected by PACE. This is especially true if farming is not profitable and if farmers believe that development is inevitable. Local government officials must recognize that farms are affected by surrounding land uses. Protected land must be buffered from residential and commercial land uses if it is to remain viable for agriculture. Finally, farmland protection requires a long-term commitment. Lands protected by PACE must be monitored, and easements enforced, if the land is to remain available for agriculture. Governments must be willing to adapt farmland protection strategies to respond to changes in economic conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Thurston County hugs the southern edge of Puget Sound and is bisected by Interstate 5, the region's major north-south highway. Its largest city is the state capitol, Olympia. Easy access to the ocean and mountains and the availability of affordable land within commuting distance to Seattle have created a strong market for homes in Thurston County. Population grew by nearly 30 percent during the 1980s, making Thurston the third-fastest-growing county in the region.

FARMLAND PROTECTION IN THURSTON COUNTY

Land in farms in Thurston County declined steadily between 1950 and 1974, then leveled off. According to the 1992 Census of Agriculture, Thurston County has approximately 60,000 acres of land in farms, accounting for approximately 12.5 percent of its land base. Major crops and commodities produced in the county include hay and beef. Vegetable and fruit cultivation is increasing, as is the number of nursery operations.

TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

1976 Comprehensive Plan

Thurston County's 1976 Comprehensive Plan recognized the loss of farmland as an important issue, and recommended evaluation of PACE and TDR as strategies to address the problem. In 1978, the county formed a committee, composed primarily of farmers, to advise the county commissioners on agricultural issues. In 1980, the county adopted a voluntary agricultural zone, but no landowners were interested in signing up for the program.

Urban growth boundaries

Thurston County planners worked with local officials in the jurisdiction's three largest cities to designate urban growth boundaries during the early 1980s. The cities of Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater signed a memorandum of understanding with the county implementing UGBs in 1983. UGBs were incorporated into city comprehensive plans in the late 1980s. The County Comprehensive Plan was revised between 1984 and 1988. As part of the revision process, county staff attempted to identify lands to be protected for long-term agricultural and forestry use, but farmers and foresters were suspicious of the county's intentions and opposed its efforts. GMA required all of Thurston County's cities and towns to adopt UGBs. In 1995, the county worked with municipal governments to revise or adopt new UGBs.

Emergency zoning

Between 1980 and 1990, Thurston County's population increased by almost 40,000 new residents. New housing construction increased by more than 31 percent. In 1989, alarmed by rapid growth, the county commissioners passed an "emergency downzone" in a region known as the Nisqually Valley. The Nisqually is a broad, flat valley located in the county's northeastern corner. The valley also encompasses a wildlife refuge. While the Nisqually is essentially undeveloped, it is divided by I-5 and adjacent to high-growth areas. During the growth boom of the 1980s, the county was concerned that without immediate action, the valley's scenic and agricultural values would be lost to development. The commissioners' action changed the zoning from one or two dwelling units per acre to one unit per five acres. The downzoning was opposed by landowners.

In 1990, the state Growth Management Act changed the climate for planning in the county. The Act required the county to designate agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance. With this mandate, the county immediately downzoned remaining rural and agricultural areas in its jurisdiction from one unit per one acre to one per five acres as a "holding measure," to slow down conversion and allow for planning. Farmers, realizing that changes in zoning were inevitable under GMA, worked with the county to designate agricultural lands.

In 1991, the county began to investigate the feasibility of a PACE program to protect farmland and compensate agricultural landowners for lost equity. An initial estimate put the cost of protecting 13,000 acres of agricultural land at approximately \$26 million. A second estimate cut the cost to \$11 million, but this sum still exceeded the amount that the county believed the public would support. Ultimately, the county decided to limit use of PACE to the Nisqually Valley, which was viewed as the top priority for protection.

Developing a PACE program for the Nisqually Valley

In 1992, Thurston County adopted the Nisqually Sub-Area Plan, which created the Nisqually Agricultural Zone. The zone encompassed approximately 1,100 acres. Zoning was changed from the 1989 “emergency” density of one unit per 5 acres to one unit per 40 acres, although landowners could still develop at one per 5 if the new units were clustered. Thurston County Senior Planner Steven Morrison describes a “gentlemen’s agreement” between the county and the Nisqually landowners: The landowners would accept the tough new zoning, with the understanding that the county would develop a PACE program²¹.

Nisqually landowner and part-time farmer Jim Myers remembers the process as being far more rancorous. When the county downzoned land in the valley, Myers formed a group called FARM—short for Farmers Against Regulatory Mischief. At first, he was not very enthusiastic about the idea of PACE. “They offered us a nickel or a gun,” he relates, explaining that the landowners opposed the downzoning-for-PACE agreement, but felt they had no recourse. Myers was also cynical about the county’s motivation for designating the Nisqually as an area of long-term agricultural significance. “It had nothing to do with peas and beans,” he insists. “The whole impetus for saving the valley is cosmetic. Period. You go down the freeway and see this beautiful green valley with a wildlife refuge. Don’t let anyone tell you it has to do with peas and beans²².”

Despite his mistrust of the county’s motives, Jim Myers worked with other Nisqually landowners and the county to develop a PACE program that would be acceptable to farmers. He held meetings in farmers’ kitchens and organized public hearings to present the county’s proposed PACE program to local residents. He invited the manager of King County’s Farmland Preservation Program to speak to the landowners. At the end of the process in 1996, Myers was confident that the PACE proposal reflected the extensive communication between Nisqually farmers and the county²³.

In 1995 there were only 19 homes on the 1,081 acres in the Nisqually Agricultural District. According to planner Steven Morrison, the county’s goal in designing a PACE program for the Nisqually was “to keep the valley exactly as it is today.” If it is economically and politically achievable, the county wants to purchase all remaining development rights in the valley.

Thurston County was fortunate in that it had a source of expertise on PACE right next door. County planners studied the King County program carefully, with an eye towards duplicating the program’s successes and avoiding its failures. They derived five important lessons from King County’s experience:

- Avoid delays in getting the program started by choosing a funding technique that can be quickly implemented;
- Allow enough time to purchase the number of properties desired, and accelerate acquisition by encouraging offers at the beginning of the program and streamlining the application and response process;
- Be realistic in estimates of program costs and the number of easements it will be possible to acquire to avoid public misunderstandings;
- Provide for two appraisals, to include both the agricultural and market values of properties, instead of having different appraisals for the two values (the latter practice was perceived to have increased the cost of easements in King County);
- Discourage the resale of preserved properties for estate use by avoiding offers which reserve a future residence on parcels smaller than 40 acres²⁴.

County planners made a decision early in the process of developing a PACE program to allow landowners to sell one development right per five acres, even though they could only develop at the rate of one unit per 40 acres. Landowners received one development right for every parcel larger than 2.5 acres. This made the program more attractive. To determine the potential cost of purchasing easements at this rate, the county commissioned an appraisal from a Seattle real estate appraisal firm. The firm calculated the difference between fair market value and agricultural value of land in the Nisqually, taking into account that small parcels are worth more per acre than large parcels, and the existence of many “physically challenged parcels” where development potential would be limited due to wetlands or location in the flood plain. The pilot appraisal, completed in November 1995, estimated the cost of purchasing easements on all of the developable land in the Nisqually Agricultural District at \$2.5 million, an average of approximately \$2,500 per acre²⁵.

The King County FPP relied on a voter-approved bond issue, which took three tries to pass. The ballot measure limited the interest rates the county was permitted to pay on the bonds, and the high interest rates of the early 1980s delayed implementation of the program. Thurston County was determined to avoid these problems. The funding source for the Nisqually program is the Conservation Futures Levy. Conservation Futures is an optional local tax of up to \$.065 per \$1,000 of assessed value, which may be used to acquire land and related interests for conservation purposes. Thurston County began collecting the tax in 1991 to acquire land for parks; funding is now divided between parks and the PACE program.

Thurston County commissioners approved the Nisqually PACE program in 1996. It offers landowners just one opportunity to sell easements. From the time that the program was implemented, landowners had 30 days to apply. The owners of 19 out of the 20 properties in the valley submitted applications in early 1997. The county will make offers to the landowners within six months, and the landowners will have six months to decide whether to accept the offers²⁶.

TDR: Taking advantage of regional planning

In 1993, a year after establishing the Nisqually Agriculture Zone, Thurston County created the Long-Term Agriculture Zone. This zone was applied to approximately 11,000 acres of land dispersed throughout the county. Density for the new zone was decreased from one house per 5 acres to one per 20, with a requirement that non-farm residences be clustered on no more than 15 percent of a parcel. When the county decided that it could not afford a PACE program for this zone, it began to explore the possibility of using TDR.

The Thurston Regional Planning Council played a central role in the development of the county's TDR program. TRPC is an intergovernmental board made up of representatives from all the local jurisdictions in the county, including the county governments. Its mission is to provide visionary leadership on regional plans, policies and issues. TRPC has its own staff and provides planning services to the county and its seven incorporated jurisdictions. A key function of TRPC is to build intergovernmental and community consensus on issues that affect the entire county. This role was crucial to the development of TDR, because the land targeted for protection was located in unincorporated areas of the county. Planners believed that development rights should be transferred to districts within urban growth boundaries.

The first step in TRPC's effort to develop a TDR program was getting buy-in from all the jurisdictions. Staff prepared a background paper on TDR to explain the concept. TRPC then hired a Maryland consulting firm to conduct a feasibility study of TDR for the county. The consultants had experience working in Montgomery County, Md., and were familiar with that jurisdiction's successful TDR program.

The study was completed in May 1994. It reviewed the concept of TDR, TDR's financial and legal aspects and the experience of jurisdictions that have used the technique. It analyzed the climate for TDR in Thurston County, including trends in population and housing, and proposed a wide range of options for how to structure a TDR program and allocate development rights. Finally, the study presented a thorough financial assessment of the market conditions for TDR. The financial analysis included a calculation of the value of development rights in several different county locations, based on the premise that landowners in the agricultural zones were entitled to one development right per 5 acres²⁷.

The study concluded that the county had the necessary conditions for successful implementation of TDR. It determined that there was land within the urban growth boundaries of the cities sufficient to absorb all of the development rights from the agricultural areas. The authors believed that the estimated value of development rights was high enough to sustain transfers that would satisfy both buyers and sellers. The study warned, however, that implementing TDR would take time, resources and a sustained commitment to "incorporate the self-interest of program participants in the design and structure of a program."

It continued:

Devising a practical TDR program will involve far more than simply adopting a TDR ordinance. TDR breaks new ground for developers, bankers, attorneys, landowners, and planners. The County must be willing to develop not only a functional program, but will need to educate and be educated by prospective participants. A continuing positive working relationship with the cities in Thurston

County will also be critical for the successful designation of prospective receiving areas in cities. A County TDR program will also require patience. Should the County elect to establish a program, it may take several years for there to be any significant market activity or actual transfers²⁸.

When the idea of TDR was first proposed, many farmers were suspicious of it. They objected to the changes in minimum lot size in the agricultural zones and were skeptical about TDR helping them recover their equity. When TRPC's staff members read the conclusions of the TDR feasibility study, they were concerned that it might not be the right time to implement TDR. Senior Planner Shanna Stevenson proposed putting program development on hold. She was surprised when the farmers on the county Agricultural Advisory Committee stepped in to defend TDR, and offered to promote the concept to "stakeholder groups" including other farmers, the building community and bankers²⁹.

Support from the Agricultural Advisory Committee encouraged TRPC to go ahead with TDR, and staff developed a TDR sending ordinance for the county. Landowners would be entitled to one development right for every 5 acres of land they owned, regardless of whether the land was actually suitable for development. They would be permitted to develop property at the density of one unit per 20 acres, but would be required to reserve one development right for each house they wanted to build. Development rights would be traded on the open market and could be used in any designated receiving area of the county. The sending ordinance was adopted by the county commissioners in November 1995.

Council staff also developed a model TDR receiving ordinance for incorporated areas. According to planner Stevenson, there was an agreement from the outset of the program that the cities would provide sufficient density in their receiving areas to accommodate all the development rights in the sending areas. Stevenson reflects that the mid-1990s were an opportune time to reserve density for development rights in the county's urban areas, because the jurisdictions were in the middle of the planning process required by the GMA. The model ordinance was distributed to each of the individual jurisdictions in the county in 1995, and council staff worked with the cities to customize it to their own goals and needs.

The conventional approach to TDR is to require the use of development rights to increase density. This was the concept used by the model receiving ordinance, and the cities of Lacey and Tumwater adopted the approach. The city of Olympia, however, chose a new and innovative strategy. With strong demand for low-density urban residences, city officials wanted to encourage compact development to prevent sprawl and facilitate public transportation. They reasoned that under current market conditions, developers might not be willing to buy development rights to build at higher densities. They might, however, be willing to pay a premium to build at *lower* densities. As a result, densities in Olympia's receiving areas range from four to eight units per acre. Under the new TDR receiving ordinance, developers can build five to seven units per acre by right, but must purchase development rights to build at the lowest and highest permissible densities. In theory, the demand for large houses on quarter-acre lots will merit the cost of purchasing development rights. City officials believe that the receiving ordinance creates a win-win situation: If development rights are purchased, farmland in the county is being protected; if they are not used, then the city will have effectively discouraged sprawl within its borders.

To promote TDR to the county's farmers, Thurston County Associate Planner Jacqueline Kettman developed a TDR information kit. The kit includes sample application forms for development rights and explains the process of selling them. It addresses farmers' concerns about how selling development rights would affect the uses and value of their property and provides a list of resources.

As of early 1997, no development rights had been transferred, but the county reports that it has received inquiries from both farmers and developers. There are other signs that the program may be successful. Senior Planner Steven Morrison notes with pride that members of the Agricultural Advisory Committee have taken ownership of the TDR program and now defend the agricultural zoning they once opposed.

Bruce Briggs, owner of Briggs' Nursery and a member of the Agricultural Advisory Committee for 15 years, sees the TDR and PACE programs as an investment in the future. He doesn't believe that TDR will be used much in the next decade, but emphasizes that "land preservation needs to start before everything gets built up³⁰."

Agricultural marketing

Like many farmers, Jim Myers insists that keeping farming profitable is the most important farmland protection strategy. Municipal governments in Thurston County are developing strategies to increase farm viability. The city of Olympia recently built a new, covered structure for its farmers' market, and the number of organic and CSA farms that use the market is growing. To increase public awareness of agriculture, several jurisdictions funded a map of farms that sell products directly to the public. The Farm Bureau has produced road signs that call attention to the county's agricultural areas.

LESSONS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The history of PACE and TDR in Thurston County demonstrates the sustained commitment necessary to develop a comprehensive farmland protection program. It took 20 years from the recommendation to pursue PACE and TDR to the time when the programs were approved. This period included seven years of intensive planning, public outreach and program development between 1989 and 1996. The Thurston County farmland protection program also illustrates the advantages of a regional approach. The Thurston Regional Planning Council's good relationship with all of the local jurisdictions was a key factor in developing the program.

Will zoning, PACE and TDR be sufficient to protect farmland and sustain agriculture in Thurston County? The planners are optimistic, but nurseryman Bruce Briggs sounds a cautionary note: "Preserving the ground is fine," he comments, "but ground doesn't have much value if you don't have water." While farmland protection has been an important issue in the 1980s and 1990s, Briggs predicts that a shortage of water for irrigation, even in wet western Washington, will be an even more important issue in the future³¹.



INTRODUCTION

FARMLAND PROTECTION
IN WALLA WALLA
COUNTY

Walla Walla County is located in southeastern Washington. The county is bordered by Oregon to the South, and the Snake River to the west. The 600,000 acres of cultivated farmland constitute more than 73 percent of the county's land base. The value of agricultural production in Walla Walla is approximately \$197 million. Major crops include wheat, barley, alfalfa, sweet corn, fruit and vegetables. The county ranks first statewide in production of alfalfa seed, second in green peas, third in wheat and seventh in total value of agricultural production. The majority of agriculture is dryland, but irrigated land produces good yields of high-value crops including alfalfa seed, apples, asparagus and sweet onions.

Walla Walla's agricultural economy is dynamic. Although its food processing industry is in decline, other sectors are growing. Broetje Orchards has grown from an experimental planting of trees to a major producer. According to Washington State University Cooperative Extension Agent Walt Gary, Broetje located in Walla Walla because of an abundance of inexpensive land. The orchard's owners built an entire town for migrant workers, who now live in the county year-round. Grape cultivation is also expanding. Since 1978, 10 wineries have opened in the county and Walla Walla is home to one of the world's largest growers of Concord grapes for juice. In recent years, farmers have begun to grow garbanzo beans and canola for oil, and the cultivation of hybrid poplar trees for pulp is increasing¹².

The city of Walla Walla is the county seat and its residential, commercial and cultural center. There are three colleges in the city. Other population centers in the county include the town of College Place and the small farming community of Touchet. Since 1990, the county has been experiencing strong residential growth. Many of the new residents are young families looking for a safe community in an attractive location with good schools. The success of agriculture in Walla Walla may also be generating demand for new housing, as migrant workers settle permanently in the county.

TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

Development pressure and the Growth Management Act

Long-time residents of Walla Walla tell a familiar story about the impact of development on the county's farmers. Third-generation farmer Craig Christensen spends a lot of time on the phone, fielding calls from developers who want to buy his land and neighbors who complain about the dust from his fields. Craig's father recently quit farming and put his land up for sale because he couldn't keep up with changing technology and new regulations. Craig has changed his practices to minimize dust, chemical use and the need to burn fields, but he's still getting complaints. If the wind shifts when he's burning a field, Christensen now expects to get calls from neighbors threatening a lawsuit. "We're going to a hotel and sending you the bill," they tell the exasperated farmer.

Christensen supported Washington's Growth Management Act as a tool to help limit development of productive farmland. He was on the county committee that designated agricultural lands of primary significance. "My main thing was to control the growth," he explains. "We looked at a soil profile for the county, and the city was built on the best farmland. I hate

to see the leapfrog effect.” Growth, he insists, is “something we’ll fight for a long time.” If it is allowed to run rampant, “people will build here, there and everywhere, and that creates water problems. The law says that if you have the right to build a house you can punch a hole and get water. We used to have two ponds and a creek fed by springs. They’re gone. The springs have dried up with the development³³.”

Growth management and land use issues are a controversial topic in the county. “I could fill a room with 50 farmers to talk about urban pressure,” contends Washington State University Cooperative Extension Agent Walt Gary. “Twenty-five would say one thing, and 25 would say the opposite.” The actions of the county commissioners reflect this divided sentiment. Between 1990 and 1996, the three commissioners, two of whom are farmers, voted to change the minimum lot size in one area of the county from 20 to 120 acres, imposed (and then removed) a ban on subdivisions on agricultural land and passed a right-to-farm ordinance. They also voted to allow a planned unit development in a remote agricultural area, and passed an ordinance upholding the property rights of the county’s residents against actions by state and federal government agencies.

Agricultural protection zoning in Russell Creek

Russell Creek runs through the southeast corner of Walla Walla County, adjacent to the Oregon border. The area is just five miles from town and has scenic views of the Blue Mountains. The community is exactly the type of place that attracts newcomers looking to escape city living. The families who farm in Russell Creek, however, do not want their land to be developed. Jeanne Brewer and her husband Harold grow wheat, garbanzos, peas, barley and canola on approximately 2,500 acres in Russell Creek. Harold is past president of the state wheat growers’ association. Some of the land he farms has been in his family since his ancestors homesteaded the property. In 1990, the Brewers started a movement to implement tough new zoning in the area.

Harold’s grandfather, John “Brownie” Mansfield, now in his 80s, remembers fighting development of Russell Creek farmland in the 1960s. He and his neighbors did not want a housing development in the middle of their farms. So Mansfield and the other farmers hired a lawyer (who also happened to be a farmer) to campaign for stricter zoning in the area. Their efforts were successful. The Agricultural Open Space District was created, and the zoning was set at one unit per 20 acres, which was the lowest density in the county³⁴.

Twenty-acre zoning worked to keep residential development out of Russell Creek for 25 years. But in the early 1990s, Harold, Jeanne and Brownie started to get concerned about new construction. Mill Creek, just over the hill from the Brewers, had 10-acre zoning, and Harold and Jeanne watched in dismay as houses replaced the farms. Changing the zoning had worked to protect farms in the past, so the Brewers and their neighbors decided to try it again.

A group of Russell Creek farmers circulated a petition to neighbors asking that the density in the Agricultural Open Space District be decreased from one house per 20 acres to one per 120 acres. Fifty-six property owners signed the petition, which was delivered to the county Planning Commission. The Planning Commission and county commissioners recommended that Russell Creek be studied as part of the county’s Growth Management Act

planning process. A local citizen's committee was appointed to investigate the issues and make suggestions.

The newly created Russell Creek Planning Area Committee included four farmers and a Walla Walla County Planning Committee member. They examined detailed maps of the area and studied existing comprehensive plan policies on agricultural land. They noted that the committee assigned to designate important natural resource lands as part of the GMA planning process recommended downzoning in Russell Creek. In 1991, the committee surveyed local residents about their opinions on zoning.

The survey results revealed mixed feelings among Russell Creek residents. Fifty percent of respondents were in favor of increasing the minimum lot size to 120 acres. This group owned about half of the total land in the district. Thirty-eight percent were farm owner-operators with average land holdings of 240 acres. An additional 6 percent of respondents were in favor of increasing the minimum lot size to less than 120 acres. Comments from residents in favor of increasing the minimum lot size emphasized the fertility of the Russell Creek area, the land's ability to produce high yields without irrigation and the difficulty of farming near non-farming neighbors³⁵.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents wanted to keep the zoning at 20 acres, and 15 percent wanted to see a decrease in the minimum lot size. These residents felt that the proposed downzoning would interfere with their property rights and limit their options³⁶.

Members of the Russell Creek committee analyzed the survey responses and petitions, and considered the impact of the proposed zoning change on residents who did not respond to the survey. They found that a majority of landowners in the area supported, did not object or would not be affected by increasing the minimum lot size to 120 acres. The committee members noted that adjacent land in Umatilla County, Ore., was zoned at one house per 160 acres, and that requests for variances and rezonings in Russell Creek had historically been denied. The projected cost of extending urban services and building new roads for the area was high. Based on these findings, the Committee recommended 5-1 to increase the zoning of the area to 120 acres, and made provisions to delete the properties of a few objecting residents who owned land on the edge of the proposed new zone.

The Walla Walla Planning Commission voted 5-3 to adopt the Russell Creek Committee's recommendation, and the County Commissioners voted 2-1 to uphold the Planning Commission's vote.

Jeanne Brewer believes that maintaining the zoning at 120 acres will be enough to protect the land in Russell Creek. The challenge will be preventing changes in the zoning and limiting development in other important farming areas in the County. The Brewers and their farming neighbors are very vigilant about attempts to develop land in Russell Creek or prime land in other parts of the county. They have spoken out against permitting variances to allow smaller lot sizes in their district. In 1996, Jeanne and Harold signed on to a lawsuit filed by farmers in the isolated agricultural community of Touchet against a proposed planned unit development. Touchet is more than 30 miles from the Brewer's farm. When asked why she is concerned about development on the other end of the county, Jeanne shakes her head. "It sets

a precedent,” she warns, “that could undo all the work we’ve done.” If the plaintiffs win the lawsuit, she explains, it will send a clear message to developers and county officials that subdivisions don’t belong in the middle of prime farmland.

Farmland protection by lawsuit: Fighting a subdivision in Touchet

In 1992, Walla Walla County Commissioners imposed a one-year ban on subdivisions on agricultural land. The ban was lifted in 1993. Since then, there have been two subdivision proposals for the rural areas. The first was withdrawn after strong objections from nearby farmers.

The second proposal, for a 32-lot planned unit development in the small farming community of Touchet in the eastern section of the county, has generated intense controversy. Alfalfa seed is the primary crop grown around Touchet. The land is irrigated, and production of alfalfa seed requires the use of highly toxic pesticides. The crop is pollinated by unique species of bees, which are raised in the fields by farmers. There are few paved roads in the area, and virtually all of the land outside the small settlement is in agriculture.

When the planning committee held hearings on the proposal, most of the farmers in the area voiced their objections to the development. They emphasized that alfalfa seed cultivation is especially incompatible with non-agricultural land uses, and that the proposed development would be contrary to the county’s planning policies. The roads to and from the proposed site, they argued, were not designed to handle regular traffic, and water supplies were inadequate to serve such a large development. The nine-member planning committee agreed with the farmers, and voted unanimously to deny the proposal. The county commissioners, however, ignored the planning committee’s recommendation, and approved the project by a 2-1 vote.

County Commissioner David Carey, a wheat grower and lifetime resident of Walla Walla, was the dissenting vote on the proposal. Carey is known as a leader in the local property rights movement, and he initially supported the PUD when he saw the project described on paper. But when he went out to look at the site, he changed his mind. “A PUD is supposed to address water, roads and sewer,” Carey explains. “But none of that was addressed, and they weren’t planning to address it.” The commissioner is a strong supporter of Washington’s GMA, and felt that the PUD would violate the intent of the law. “It ran contrary to everything we’ve been trying to do to this point,” he reflects. “It just didn’t make sense³⁷.”

Walla Walla 2020, an environmental and historical preservation organization, encouraged local farmers to file a lawsuit against the development. The suggestion was met with skepticism. Touchet is a small, tight-knit community where maintaining good relationships with neighbors is important. But farmers were also afraid of the potential impact of the development. Touchet resident Russ Byerly didn’t want 30 neighbors across the road from his farm. He was concerned that 30 new wells could affect his water supply. He wanted to uphold the county plan and protect the viability of his operation. Byerly and all but one of the farmers with land adjoining the proposed development signed on to the suit³⁸.

The lawsuit charged that the development was not in compliance with the county’s comprehensive plan and subdivision ordinance, nor with the county plan for resource lands

developed under the GMA. The Washington State Superior Court overturned the county commissioners' action on the grounds that they did not have a record to back up their finding that the planned unit development was consistent with the county comprehensive plan. The commissioners appealed, and the case was scheduled to be heard by the Washington Court of Appeals in 1997.

Right-to-Farm Ordinance

The Walla Walla County Resource Lands Technical Advisory Committee recommended that the county adopt a right-to-farm ordinance to further the goals of the GMA. In 1995, Walla Walla county commissioners implemented the committee's recommendation. The ordinance protects farmers from nuisance complaints as long as they conform to generally accepted agricultural practices. The ordinance also offers nuisance protection to farms based on changes in land use nearby, and requires a notice in the deed of new residential properties located within one-quarter mile of land zoned for agriculture.

Ordinance 219

In 1993, Walla Walla County Commissioners approved "An Ordinance for the Purpose of Coordinating County, Federal and State Government Actions Affecting Land and Natural Resources in Walla Walla County." The statute, commonly known as Ordinance 219, was sponsored by local property rights activists. It directs the federal and state governments to consult with local officials on any proposed actions that affect land use and natural resources in the county; to involve the county in planning, research, hearings and environmental impact assessments; to submit a list of alternatives to any actions that might conflict with county laws, policies and plans; and to mitigate any adverse impacts on "culture, custom, economic stability or protection and use of the environment"³⁹.

Ordinance 219 requires the federal and state governments to prepare an impact statement for any proposed regulations that may affect "the ability of County citizens to use land and use and conserve natural resources for agricultural and livestock purposes." It directs federal and state agencies to avoid taking actions that are inconsistent with county right-to-farm laws and policies, or that would have the effect of making agriculture financially inefficient; and to give adequate consideration to the designation and use of lands as agricultural lands in the Comprehensive Plan⁴⁰. The ordinance also addresses timber production; cultural resources, recreation, wildlife and wilderness; land acquisition and disposition; water and mineral resources; and clean air regulations.

Ordinance 219 was extremely controversial when it was approved and continues to be a subject of debate. Environmentalists strongly opposed the ordinance, claiming that it would interfere with laws designed to protect public health and natural resources. Many farmers and ranchers supported Ordinance 219 as a means to keep agriculture economically viable. County Commissioner Carey sees the ordinance as a farmland protection strategy, and argues that it has encouraged farmers and ranchers to become more involved in issues that affect them⁴¹.

LESSONS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Walla Walla's farmland protection efforts are somewhat atypical in that they have been led almost exclusively by farmers. Many young farmers see land protection as a means of ensuring the future of agriculture in the county, and are working on plans, passing new regulations, and going to court to defend their ability to farm. Yet Walla Walla is also a very conservative community. Older landowners are suspicious of outside interests or interference in their affairs, and many are opposed to any restriction on their right to use their property as they choose. Although the county's farmers do not see eye-to-eye about land use issues, they do listen to their neighbors.

Many communities begin their efforts to protect farmland years or decades into the process of land conversion. Walla Walla, in contrast, is still predominantly agricultural, and farming is very profitable. The county retains a wealth of agricultural support services, and farmers are experimenting with new, high-value crops. The local government is still led by farmers.

Strong farmer leadership, a healthy agricultural economy and political support for farming give Walla Walla a unique opportunity to protect its agricultural land and prevent the widespread emergence of urban development that interferes with farming. The greatest challenge for Walla Walla's farmer leadership will be developing a consensus on agricultural land use issues that satisfies both conservationists and property rights advocates.

Washington provides a good example of how state and local governments can work together to address the challenges of farmland conversion. The state Growth Management Act provided counties with a mandate to protect important agricultural land. King County interpreted that mandate by revising its comprehensive plan and developing a wide range of regulatory and incentive-based proposals to protect farmland. Thurston County used the GMA to justify the enactment of agricultural protection zoning. In Walla Walla County, the GMA requirement to designate important agricultural land made farmland protection part of the local planning process. The county's young farmers have become strong advocates of growth management and have used GMA requirements as evidence to support a lawsuit challenging the development of housing on prime farmland.

CONCLUSION

The history of farmland protection programs in King, Thurston and Walla Walla counties is also a good example of the diversity of techniques and strategies that communities can use to meet the challenges of farming on the edge. King County started with a PACE program, added limited agricultural zoning, and is investigating strategies to promote farming and provide assistance to farmers. Thurston County started with zoning, added PACE and TDR programs and is promoting farming through farmers' markets and road signs. Walla Walla is using APZ and a right-to-farm ordinance. All three counties have implemented farmland protection programs in the context of a comprehensive planning process and the state GMA.

The shortcomings of King County's PACE program suggest an important lesson for other communities. Protecting dispersed blocks of farmland from development is not enough

to sustain agriculture. PACE is a powerful farmland protection tool, but it must be used strategically. If land uses adjacent to protected farms conflict with commercial agriculture, farming is likely to decline or disappear, despite the fact that the land is protected. States, counties and towns need to take a comprehensive approach to the problems facing farmers in urban-influenced communities.

The key to political acceptance of farmland protection is involving the agricultural community from the outset. When Thurston County planners implemented emergency down-zoning of farmland, they met with a hostile response from farmers. It took several years to restore trust. In Walla Walla County, the movement for agricultural protection zoning was led by farmers, who have slowly built political support for land protection.

Washington continues to be fertile ground for the development of innovative farmland protection programs. Whitman County is revising its comprehensive plan to protect farmland while allowing for residential and commercial growth. San Juan County has created a land bank funded by a 1-percent real estate transfer tax. Skagit County's PACE program, created in 1996, is funded by a 6.5-cent county property tax authorized by the Conservation Futures legislation; the same funding source used by Thurston County. Clallam, Pierce and Chelan counties are also investigating farmland protection techniques and strategies.

The emergence and growth of county farmland protection programs in Washington suggest two lessons for other places where farmland is threatened by development. First, state legislation can jump-start the development of local farmland protection programs. Second, the existence of one or two local programs can serve as examples and provide a starting point for other communities.

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