

# **MAINTAIN AGRICULTURE VIABILITY**

## **(Taken from Appendix F of the Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District's Long Range Business Plan for 2011-2015)**

### **Description of Resource Concern**

Imagine a world without agriculture. Farmers supply the food we eat and contribute to many products we use daily. The land farmers use to grow these products is under constant pressure to be converted to residential or commercial uses. Once this land is converted to a non-farm use, it will likely never return to farm production again. The loss of farmland is an extremely important issue globally, but at the local level as well; one the District feels strongly about.

Agriculture is a part of Washington County that is necessary to a sustainable environment, strong economy, and a healthy way of life. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, 127,984 acres of Washington County are in farm land, accounting for about 35% of the total land area in the county. In 2007, there were a total of 1,761 farms, with an average size of 73 acres. Almost three-fourths of the farms are less than 50 acres. These farms sold over \$311 million worth of agriculture products in 2007 alone.

However, over the past 28 years, Washington County has lost 58,000 acres of farmland at a rate of over 1.3% per year<sup>1</sup>. As farmland continues to decrease, so do the businesses and institutions that support agriculture production. This support infrastructure includes farm-related businesses such as tractor dealers, feed stores, processing plants, and farmers markets. Without farm-related businesses in the county, farmers would be forced to drive hundreds of miles to purchase supplies and equipment necessary to generate agriculture products. Washington County must maintain a "critical mass" of farm land, infrastructure, and economic benefits to support a viable agriculture industry.

The District is dedicated to this issue and will do whatever it takes to advocate for a strong and viable agriculture industry. According to ODA, agriculture lands represent perpetual, renewable, adaptable, and sustainable economic and ecological value.

### **Highlights of Accomplishments**

The District is a strong advocate for retaining agriculture lands. This can be seen through the development of conservation plans and establishing relationships with local partners.

The District has also been working to control loss of farmland through erosion control practices in conservation plans. Conservation plans encourage farmers to continue farming and improve their management practices to decrease costs and improve agriculture lands for future generations.

Involvement in meetings and planning sessions with local partner organizations is another way the District has been involved with agriculture-related issues. The District is a respected source of information. Partners value the District's opinions and expertise.

### **Desired Conditions**

- Levels of sales allow farms and forests to stay in business.

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<sup>1</sup> Searle, B. 2004. *A Comprehensive Valuation of Agriculture Lands: A Perpetual Investment in Oregon's Economy and Environment*. Oregon Department of Agriculture, Salem. [http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/do\\_reports\\_land.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/do_reports_land.shtml)

- No loss of farm land.
- Conservation easements are used extensively to conserve lands.
- Future generations wish to keep farms operating.
- Support infrastructures are strong enough to support farm and forest operations and are available locally.
- Maintain “critical mass” of farm land, infrastructure, and economic benefits to an adequate level to support an agriculture industry.

## Goals

By the end of 2015, the agriculture industry in Washington County is as strong or stronger as it was in 2010.

## Strategies and Actions

**Table 1. Timeline of Desired Conditions and Actions for Maintain Agriculture Viability**

<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Actions</b>
Maintaining a steady land base	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with local partners to maintain agriculture lands.</li> <li>▪ Utilize conservation easements to conserve lands.</li> </ul>
Being a voice in agriculture-related political affairs	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attend community meetings when relevant.</li> <li>▪ Utilize local newspapers to support agriculture-related affairs.</li> </ul>
Communicating to the encroaching urban population about agriculture life	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Employ or contract with a Public Information Specialist to generate a bi-monthly news article or press release.</li> <li>▪ Educate the general public about general farming practices by utilizing local newspapers.</li> </ul>
Use of ODA to monitor percent of county businesses related to agriculture	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Utilize the Oregon Agricultural Statistics Service.</li> </ul>
Defend approved agriculture practices when confronted by actions with adverse intentions	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attend community meetings when relevant.</li> <li>▪ Answer questions from the general public when asked about agriculture practices.</li> <li>▪ Educate the general public about general farming practices by utilizing local newspapers.</li> </ul>
Maintain a “critical mass” of farm land, infrastructure and economic benefits to an adequate level to support an agriculture industry.	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Educate the general public, local government, and Oregon legislature about the importance of “critical mass” of farm land.</li> <li>▪ Work with local partners to maintain a “critical mass” in Washington County.</li> </ul>

**Key partners necessary to achieve the desired conditions include:**

- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Oregon Department of Agriculture
- Washington County
- Clean Water Services
- Municipalities
- Metro
- Tualatin River Watershed Council
- Washington County Farm Bureau
- Oregon Farm Bureau

**Measurements**

- Loss of farm acres
- Gross revenue from agriculture production in Washington County