



Photo Credit: Hazel Blue Acres Farm / PhotoVoice 2017

# Snohomish Farmland Conservation Strategy

Farmland in Snohomish County is at risk. As one of the fastest growing counties in the country, we are losing farmland to development and other non-agricultural uses quickly. Agriculture in Snohomish County is a \$139.5-million-dollar industry, and Snohomish County residents place significant value on farmland for the many benefits it provides: local food, open space, wildlife habitat, and flood storage. The goal of the Snohomish Farmland Conservation Strategy is to protect our farmland into the future.

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## Snohomish Farmland Conservation Working Group

The Snohomish Farmland Conservation Working Group (the Working Group) is responsible for implementing this strategy, and includes the Snohomish Conservation District, PCC Farmland Trust, Forterra, The Nature Conservancy, Snohomish County, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, with input from the Agriculture Resilience Plan Steering committee and other local farmers. The Agriculture Resilience Plan is a larger effort to create a countywide plan for a resilient farming community in Snohomish County.

## Goals & Priorities

With input from local farmers and partner organizations, the Working Group has developed a map of priority parcels to serve as a guide for conservation. The Working Group's conservation goal is 15,000 acres over 10 years. While this goal is short-term, the Working Group will continue to build a long-term goal that ensures a critical mass of farmland is protected in Snohomish County to sustain the agricultural industry into the future.

***10 year goal = permanently protect 15,000 acres of the best farmland***

## Conservation Strategy

The Snohomish Farmland Conservation Strategy uses a voluntary conservation approach that includes the purchase of agricultural conservation easements or acquisition of land from willing sellers. Farmers decide if they want to protect their land for future generations of farming and are compensated for the sale of their development rights. The Working Group's mapping effort will help prioritize areas that are of high-value for farming and at-risk for conversion to other non-farming uses.

## Funding Strategy

The Working Group will be collaborating with existing granting agencies at the local, state, and federal levels to increase the capacity and efficacy of farmland preservation funding programs. Due to limited funding availability, the Working Group is exploring the potential to leverage new funding sources by increasing landowner interest in conservation and seeking landscape-scale opportunities within local farming communities.

## Farmland Prioritization Mapping

Based on feedback from the eleven local farmers that serve on the Agriculture Resilience Plan Steering Committee, other local producers, partner organizations, and agricultural interests, criteria were developed and mapped to prioritize the protection of large, contiguous blocks of farmland critical to sustaining long-term commercial agricultural production. Our map will serve as a working document that will be informed by forthcoming information on potential climate impacts to flooding, sea level rise, and groundwater levels. Below are some examples of our mapping criteria.

### Quality of Farmland

- Parcel size
- Zoning
- Adjacency to other farms
- Prime soils
- Low wetland abundance
- Protection from flooding

### Threat of Conversion

- Proximity to UGA
- Pending plats
- Retention of development rights
- Projected population growth

### Likelihood of Funding

- Proximity to conserved lands
- Proximity to open space corridors
- Presence of fish and wildlife habitat



Photo Credit: Anna Caruso / PhotoVoice 2017

## Key Partners & Initiatives

This countywide farmland protection effort is an integral component of the **Agriculture Resilience Plan** (the Plan), which is led by the Snohomish Conservation District and local farmers. The priorities identified in the Plan, including farmland conservation, are a part of the **Sustainable Lands Strategy** – a multi-benefit planning process for our floodplains that aims to optimize solutions for salmon habitat restoration, farm viability, and flood risk mitigation. Informed by the Snohomish Farmland Conservation Strategy, the Plan will provide risk management tools such as flooding and groundwater predictions to farmers as well as help develop landscape-scale resilience projects that ensure farmland viability into the future.

The Stillaguamish River Valley is one of the high-priority areas targeted for voluntary farmland protection. An outreach effort led by The Nature Conservancy and Klesick Family Farms, the **Stilly Valley Protection Initiative**, has activated the enthusiasm of local farmers to start using conservation tools within this valley. Farmland protection in this valley ensures local food production, wildlife habitat, and flood capacity for our communities. Funding for implementation of this initiative is not yet secured.

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*As with other real estate transactions, the discussions and details of the Working Group are intended to be confidential. However, collaborators and stakeholders in Snohomish County will be briefed regularly.*

*For more information about the Snohomish Farmland Conservation Strategy, contact **Robin Fay** at [robin.fay@pccfarmlandtrust.org](mailto:robin.fay@pccfarmlandtrust.org). To learn more about the Agriculture Resilience Plan, contact **Cindy Dittbrenner** at [cindy@snohomishcd.org](mailto:cindy@snohomishcd.org).*