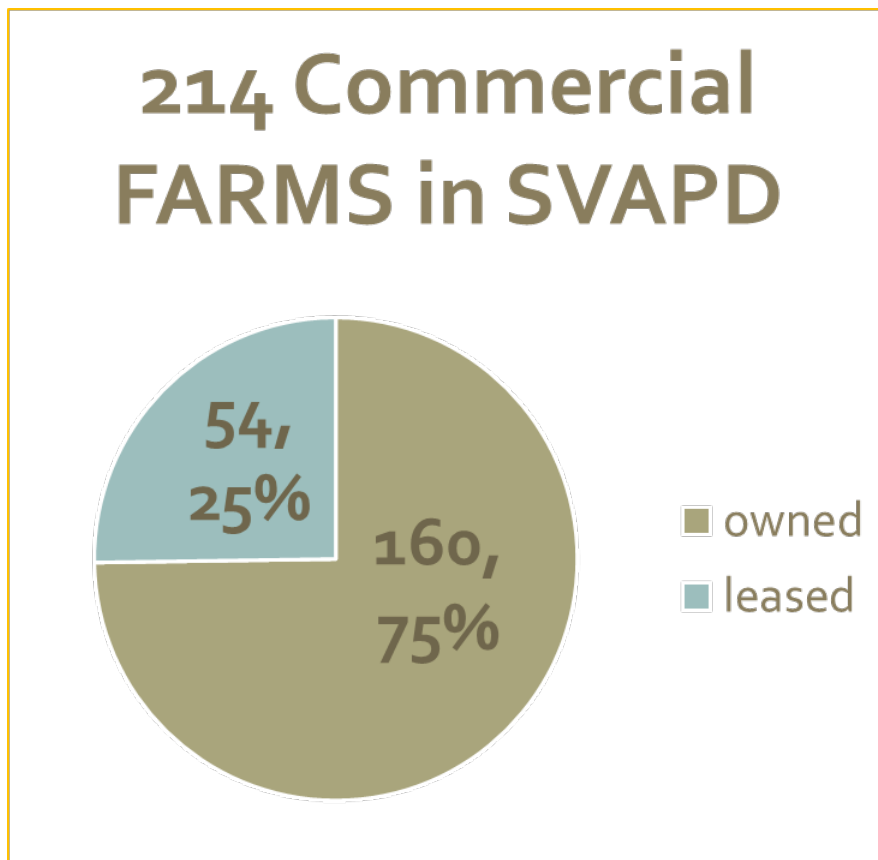


## A. Introduction and Profile of the Commercial Agriculture Sector in the SVAPD

### Current Condition

### Desired Condition by 2048

Figure 1. # Of Commercial Farms in SVAPD



The Snoqualmie Valley Agricultural Production District is home to a thriving, diverse agriculture sector dedicated to improving and preserving farmable acres to optimize productivity, especially food production, today and for future generations. Farmer/landowners have a shared focus and understanding of strategic farmland productivity needs and priorities, how to accomplish infrastructure improvements and preservation through service providers, committed long-term funding, regulatory advocacy, and multi-benefit partnerships. The collaboration and engagement between farmer/landowners and service providers routinely yields strategic plan results.

### Timeline

- 2023
  - Adopt the plan
- 2025
  - Review plan progress and adaptively manage
- 2030
  - Review plan progress and adaptively manage
- 2035
  - Review plan progress and adaptively manage
- 2040
  - Review plan progress and adaptively manage
- 2045-8
  - Review plan progress, summarize progress, recommend next steps

#### Commercial farms leased and owned, demographics

The rich, deep, irreplaceable soils, soil health,<sup>1</sup> and the level valley floor of the Snoqualmie Valley Agriculture Production District (SVAPD) have been the location for a thriving agriculture sector for 175 years. The SVAPD is now home to 214 commercial farm enterprises<sup>2</sup> that are the foundation of the current agriculture economic sector. 160 or 75% of these farm operations own the land on which they farm. The majority by far of these farmland owners identify as White, but several identify as Asian. Another 54 operations or 25% lease the land on which they farm. Of the operations that lease land to farm, at least 21 are Hmong owned businesses, 15 are new or beginning businesses (operators farming 10 years or less), one is a Black owned business, and 17 are by experienced operators that are likely White owned businesses. With a quarter of operations leasing land to farm by a majority of socially underserved farmers, land access is an equity and social justice concern.

#### Acreage by crop type, scale of operations, and primary markets

The SVAPD includes three dairies, numerous u-pick berry and flower farms, small-scale livestock operations that raise meat, eggs and/or fiber, as well as operations that grow dozens of varieties of vegetables. These farm operations by acreage are primarily forage, livestock, vegetable and berries, and flower production in decreasing order.

From 1900-1950, dairies were the cornerstone of the ag sector in the APD. Today, the three remaining dairies sell to distributors, who then sell directly to the public.

However, the majority of farm businesses by number grow specialty crops (vegetables, berries, flowers, etc.) on small-scale farms consistent with the County's USDA NASS report of most farms being 1-9 acres or 10-49 acres in size,<sup>3</sup> and sell directly to the public. Farm stands, community supported agriculture (CSA), farmers markets, restaurants, and agri-tourism options are important business for these farms. King County boasts the strongest farm-direct marketplace in the state, with King County farmers markets reporting farm vendor sales of \$16.6 million in 2021.<sup>4</sup> All of the SVAPD farms sell locally, whether to King County, Puget Sound, or Washington State customers.

#### **Economic and employment indicators**

There is no surprise that economic data for this small sub-region does not exist beyond the USDA NASS report for King County, as a whole, showing a market value of agriculture products sold as a minimum of \$135,464,000.<sup>5</sup> Research was conducted to garner the economic impact of the SVAPD ag sector through agriculture support services and businesses for the surrounding zip codes of the SVAPD by soliciting state business listings by agriculture North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes.<sup>6</sup> However, the resulting business support service listing was inconclusive due to out-of-date information because business licensing can be renewed even when a business is no longer operating.

In 2010, Skagit County cites 1.5 or smaller as the likely economic multiplier for agriculture in their county.<sup>7</sup> If we use the economic multiplier 1.5 multiplied in correlation with King County's total agriculture sales of \$135,464,000, that would translate into \$203,196,000 of economic activity generated from agriculture in King County – an additional \$67,732,000 beyond reported sales, from agricultural support services. Economic multipliers are tricky and the scale of agriculture production as well as markets are very different between Skagit and King Counties. However, this helps provide some context on the potential overall economic importance and impact of the local agriculture sector.

Looked at another way, King County has a total of 40,000 farmed acres with 25,000 acres being farmed for food. By taking King County's total agriculture sales of \$135,464,000, and dividing that by 40,000 total farmed acres, and assuming all agricultural products are the same value, a per acre/sales value would equal roughly \$3,387 and would then have an economic value in the SVAPD of \$29,355,049. As mentioned above, the SVAPD has a majority of high value specialty crops known to make as much as \$30,000/acre in sales. If we calculate \$30,000/acre in sales for half of the SVAPD's farmable acreage and \$3,387/acre for the other half of the acreage the total sales would be \$144,697,524 or about ten million more than the self-reported number of total King County agriculture sales to USDA NASS. If we multiply the 1.5 economic multiplier with these estimated total sales, we have generated \$217,046,287 of agriculture economic activity – an additional \$72,348,762 beyond estimated sales.

Based on conversations with a subset of farming operations in the SVAPD, the SVAPD's 214 farm operations employ as many as 467 people year-round and an additional estimated 2,140 jobs seasonally.<sup>8</sup> If year-round jobs are calculated at \$25-40/hour this equates to roughly \$2.4 - 3.9M, and an additional estimated \$20.5M in seasonal wages at \$20/hour for twelve weeks,<sup>9</sup> for an estimated total of about \$23.7M annually in economic activity from wages.

#### **Acreage currently farmed and infrastructure**

The SVAPD is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest APD by acreage and contains 35% of King County's total acreage farmed for food. The 214 operations currently farm on 7,417 acres with an additional 201 acres in farm infrastructure such as homes, barns, other ag buildings, and farm access roads, leaving 1,060 acres fallow but farmable in the SVAPD. Within this zone there are 8,668 farmable<sup>10</sup> acres and 6,263 unfarmable<sup>11</sup> acres.

#### **Challenges being felt by these commercial farmers**

While farms in the SVAPD are under immense pressure, additional pressure from Covid recovery, labor shortages, regulations for food safety, energy costs, and changing markets,

this strategic plan focuses on the land resource and infrastructure needs that are also part of the pressure equation. Farmers need the ability to be flexible, to immediately change and react to pressures in order to succeed. Farmers also need regulatory improvement and flexible agriculture support systems to meet these changes. Without immediate attention to these issues within the SVAPD, the farming sector is under threat.

Background	Service Providers	Priority
<p><b>Where is it? What is it? Why it matters?</b></p> <p>The Snoqualmie Valley Agricultural Production District (SVAPD) encompasses 14,931 acres and is located along the Snoqualmie River in North Central King County, Washington. It is an hour’s drive east of Seattle and stretches north from the unincorporated town of Fall City to the city of Carnation, extending north from Carnation to the city of Duvall and then further north to the county line with Snohomish. See Map 1.</p> <p>The SVAPD is located within the traditional territory of Coast Salish People who negotiated terms for ongoing co-existence with the United States in 1854-1855 and memorialized those terms by signing the Treaty of Point Elliott. The County continues to be home to the descendants of Coast Salish People, many of whom are present-day members of the Snoqualmie and Tulalip Tribes (and other tribes).</p> <p>The Snoqualmie and Tulalip Tribes are each federally recognized Indian tribes, who retain sovereign rights to govern themselves; maintain discrete homeland reservations; and interact with the landscape to meet their spiritual, subsistence, and economic needs. The SVAPD maintains a relationship with each of these Tribes structured on government-to-government principles and embraces the concept of tribal self-determination.</p> <p>The Snoqualmie Valley’s “agriculture heritage began with seasonal berry and root crop harvests long before the first permanent non-Native settlements above Snoqualmie Falls in the 1850s and 1860s.”<sup>12</sup> As the railroads to Seattle were completed, and the “logging and timber industry” declined, agriculture moved into the valley “near Fall City in the late 1870’s” primarily with high value hops production until an aphid infestation in 1890. Valley farmers then primarily switched to dairying for the next 50 years.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>From 1900-1950 “several factors were responsible for the success of dairy farming in the valley: the decline in land values after the aphid infestation resulted in smaller parcels requiring a more intensive form of farming, rail infrastructure expanded, and dairying technology advanced, making it economical for farmers.”<sup>14</sup></p> <p>Even with the early success of agriculture in the valley, “its agricultural distinction began a slow decline beginning in the 1950s as farmers experienced an increase in government regulations, the continued battle against flood control, and growing development pressure surrounding the valley.”<sup>15</sup></p> <p>The SVAPD is one of five APDs<sup>16</sup> in King County. The soils within the SVAPD include “prime farmland” as classified by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).<sup>17</sup> Because of these high-quality soils and several other beneficial growing conditions, as part of WA’s Growth Management Act in 1985, King County created the zoning protections of the Snoqualmie River Valley Agriculture Production District. This action designated the APD as farmland “of long-term commercial significance for agriculture” in Washington State and further protects this natural resource for food and fiber production.<sup>18</sup></p> <p>Today, the SVAPD continues to make the most of smaller farming parcels, through high value crop production and by maximizing its proximity to high value direct and wholesale markets. The sector continues to be harmed by stringent regulations, flooding, and growing development pressure.</p>	<p>Lead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KC WLRD Agriculture Program</li> <li>• King County Local Food Initiative</li> </ul> <p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SnoValley Tilth</li> <li>• WSU</li> </ul>	<p><b>HIGH</b></p>

In acknowledging the evolution of this landscape and human history, we know the future must be collaborative. We look forward to working more closely with our environmental partners, staff from local Tribes, and County and State government to partner and accomplish multi-benefit projects. Ag lands are an integral part of the ecosystem, ag lands and habitat often border one another, and we have to work together to weather population growth and climate change impacts on the natural and agricultural environment.

## Strategies

The Task Force Scope of Work<sup>19</sup> laid out two main goals for the plan:

- 1) *Improve the long-term productivity of farmland, bring more acres into production, especially food production, and increase opportunities for farmers to develop the necessary infrastructure to support or increase their farm businesses and*
- 2) *Propose acreage to permanently protect for farming<sup>20</sup>.*

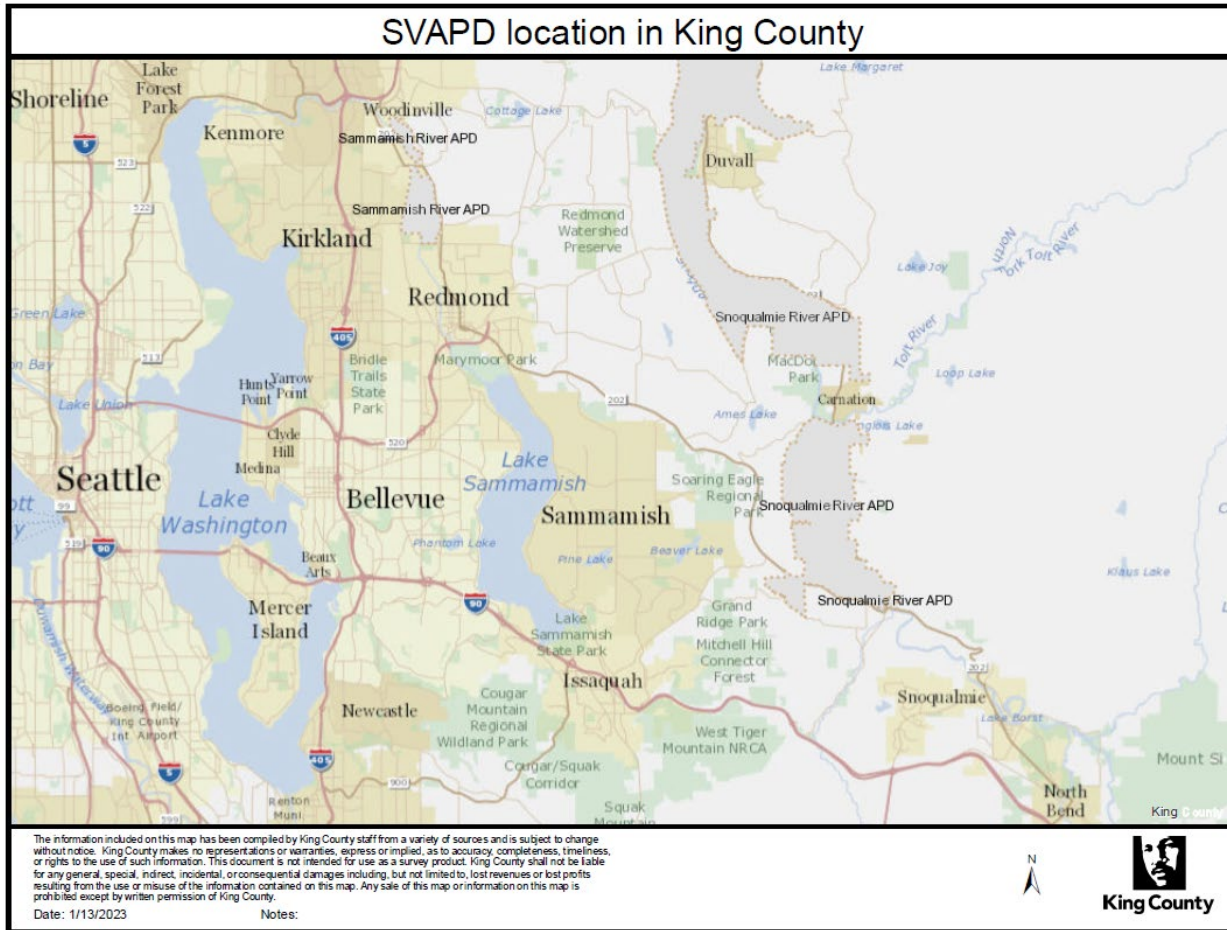
### Goal #1: Improved Farmland Productivity

1. All farmable acreage in the SVAPD is routinely improved through **drainage** so that the land can be productively farmed for the full length of the growing season.
2. **Transportation** infrastructure including revetments, roads and bridges is fully functioning to support the movement of agricultural products while managing traffic to increase safety for all and prioritize routine operation of farms every day.
3. Every commercial farm has sufficient access to water for **irrigation** and uses best management practices and technology to manage water usage. Farms keep existing water rights, continue water transfers through SVWID, and increase access to water transfers.
4. Every commercial farm has sufficient access (close proximity and enough space) to high ground for equipment, storage, and livestock, and every farm home below the base flood elevation is elevated to ensure **flood safety** and continued productivity on the farm. Farm homes in the APD that are safer from floods are saved so that families can live on the property or close to the property they farm while education about known patterns of flooding, climate change predictions, farm preparation and flood monitoring occurs in order to support **flood safety**.
5. Commercial farms maintain and increase agricultural productivity through adaptively managing changing plant pathogens, crop varieties, animal diseases, precipitation changes affecting water flows and irrigation needs through **climate change** research and education relevant to Western Washington and the Snoqualmie Valley APD.

### Goal #2: Increased Farmland Protections

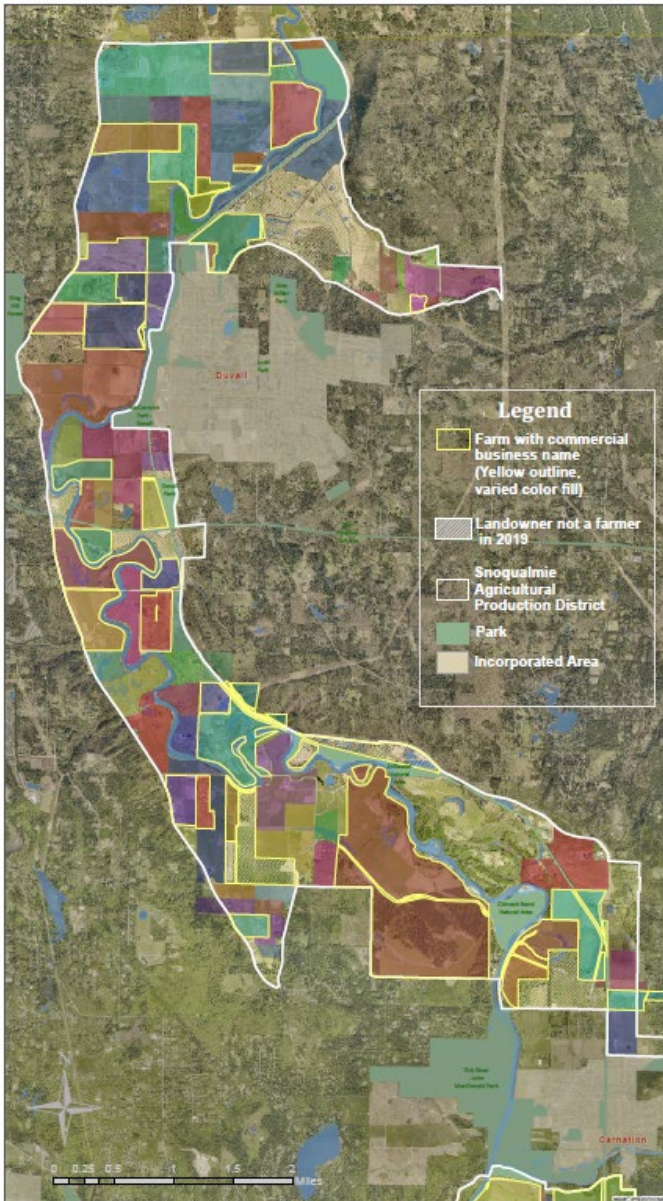
6. The APD is increasingly protected from **Population Growth and Development impacts**, through increased enforcement of unpermitted zoning uses that negatively affect productive farmland and traffic studies to limit interference with commercial farm activities. In addition, run-off from any new development is strenuously reviewed to prevent any negative impacts to the productive farmland in the floodplain or flood safety.
7. Protections for commercial farmland and crops in the APD allows for adaptive management of **wildlife** impacts using a variety of tools including policy, partnerships with Tribes and hunters, new research, and educational resources for BMPs, on-call service providers, cost-share programs, and enrollment in crop insurance to recover from wildlife damage.
8. All farm properties in the APD are protected through King County **Farmland Preservation** Program easements to ensure farmability in perpetuity, testing new tools such as required farming of FPP properties to additionally limit land value escalation over time in order to improve the barrier to purchasing access to productive farmland.
9. SVAPD farmland is protected at the minimum of a **proposed 7,696 (7,700) farmable acres for a long-term, viable agriculture sector**.

Map 1. Snoqualmie Valley Agriculture Production District location in King County, WA



Map 2. Snoqualmie Valley Commercial Farms 2019: Operations Grouped by Landowner

## Snoqualmie Valley Commercial Farms 2019



Total Commercial Farms (by landowner) in APD: 160

Number of Commercial Farms: 160

2017 King County Aerials

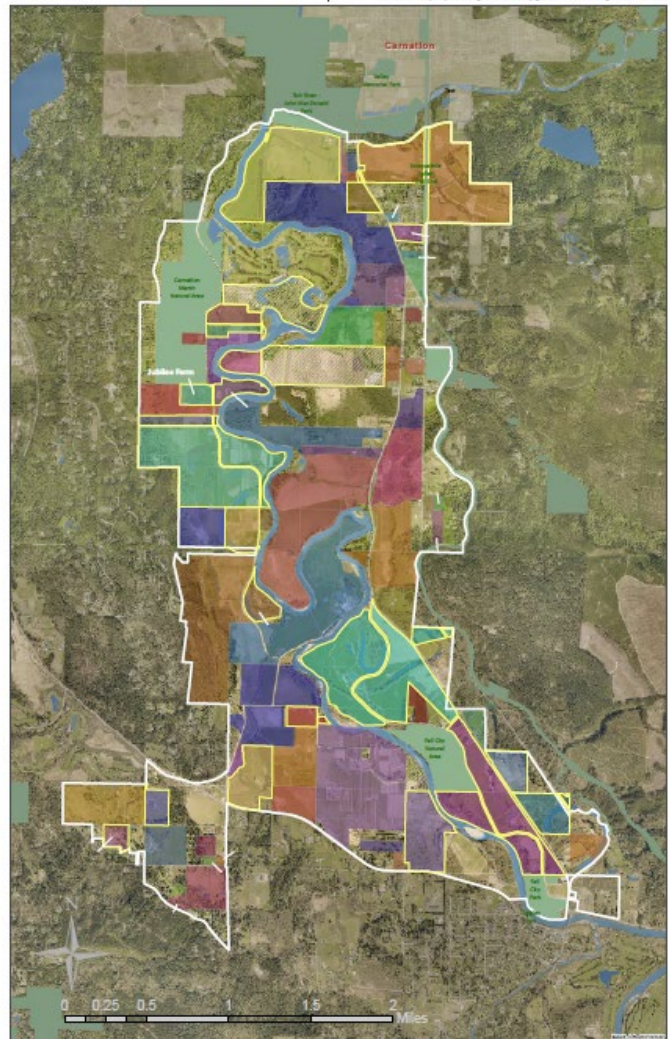
\*Note: New layers in 2017 King County Aerials. Imagery will not be available for certain areas (gravel quarries, etc.)

Farms were created by classifying parcel boundaries between parcels of the same farm ownership. Therefore farms do not include land in production but represent a congregation of parcels under one land ownership.

**King County**  
Department of Natural Resources and Parks  
**Water and Land Resources Division**

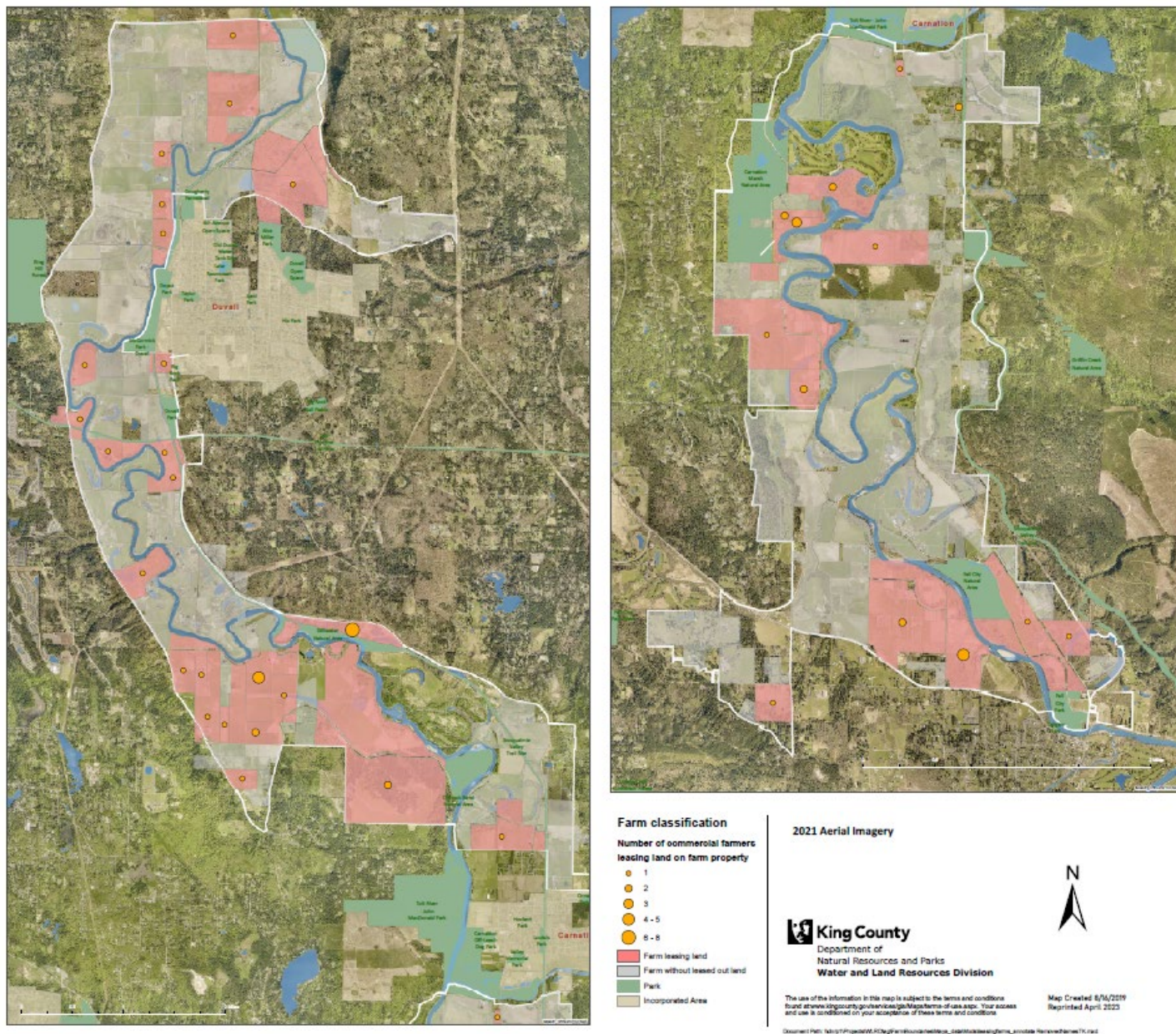
Map Created 8/16/2019  
Reprinted April 2023

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**Map 3. Snoqualmie Valley Commercial Farm Leases 2019**

**Snoqualmie Valley Commercial Farm Leases 2019**



<sup>1</sup> For more information on what soil health is and its importance, see the USDA NRCS [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed on 2/14/23.

<sup>2</sup> King County Agriculture Program research conducted in 2019 by King County intern based on Current Use Agriculture Tax Enrollment, Commercial Farm listings such as Sno-Valley Tilth’s Directory and Puget Sound Fresh, local farm knowledge by task force members and King County staff.

<sup>3</sup> USDA NASS, “King County Washington: 2017 Census of Agriculture County Profile” [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1.17.23.

<sup>4</sup> King County, “King County Farmers Markets: 2021”, August 15, 2022. [\[LINK\]](#) Accessed 9.1.22. Report prepared for King County Department of Natural Resources, Water and Land Resources Division by Washington State Farmers Market Association.

<sup>5</sup> USDA NASS, “King County Washington: 2017 Census of Agriculture County Profile” [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1.17.23. These are self-reported numbers and estimated systematically by NASS, but trend toward capturing the minimum sales due to under-reporting.

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- <sup>6</sup> NAICS is the standard used by Federal statistical agencies in classifying business establishments for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and publishing statistical data related to the U.S. business economy.
- <sup>7</sup> Buckley, Mark et. al, "Economic Indicators of Agriculture's Future in Skagit County" ECONorthwest, November 2010. Prepared for Skagit County. Page 10 [18]. [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 2/6/23.
- <sup>8</sup> Estimate based upon each farm operation employing 2 people year-round (422) and 3 dairies employing an estimated 45 employees total year-round for a total of 467. In addition, each operation further employs 1-20 employees seasonally, based on type of production (using 10 x 214). Based on conversations with a subset of farming operations in the SVAPD.
- <sup>9</sup> Estimate based upon 467 year-round jobs calculated at \$25-40/hour for a minimum of 2,080 hours/year (this is an industry standard for a 5 day work week of 8 hour days and does not reflect the time farming takes 7 days week, for work days averaging 12 hours) this equates to roughly \$2.4 - 3.9M, and an additional estimated \$20.5M in seasonal wages at 2,140 seasonal jobs at \$20/hour for twelve weeks, for an estimated total of about \$24.3M annually in economic activity from wages. King County's minimum wage is \$15.74 as of January 1, 2023, but many farms pay above minimum wage in order to remain competitive in recruiting and retaining workers. The Federal Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) for the H-2A Program is \$17.97.
- <sup>10</sup> Farmable classification is land that can be readily farmed. Farmable includes the sub-categories of currently farmed, fallow, and agriculture infrastructure.
- <sup>11</sup> Unfarmable classification is land that can never be farmed again. Unfarmable includes the sub-categories of unfarmable (steep slope, forested, wetland, lakes, right of ways, non-ag buildings, recreation) mainstem, oxbow or channel, and roads+misc. .
- <sup>12</sup> Shannon Sawyer, HistoryLink.Org, "Policy for watershed planning in the Snoqualmie Valley Agriculture Production District is added to the King County Comprehensive Plan on December 3, 2012," Essay 20793. Last updated 6/6/2019. [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 2/6/23.
- <sup>13</sup> Shannon Sawyer, HistoryLink.Org, "Policy for watershed planning in the Snoqualmie Valley Agriculture Production District is added to the King County Comprehensive Plan on December 3, 2012," Essay 20793. Last updated 6/6/2019. [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 2/6/23.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Per King County Comprehensive Plan R-643, Agricultural Production Districts are blocks of contiguous farmlands where agriculture is supported through the protection of agricultural soils and related support services and activities. Roads and natural features are appropriate boundaries for Agricultural Production Districts to reduce the possibility of conflicts with adjacent land uses.
- <sup>17</sup> USDA NRCS, "Special Environmental Resource Concerns: Prime and Unique Farmlands." March 2012. [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1/31/23.
- <sup>18</sup> Washington State WAC 365-190-050 [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1/21/23.
- <sup>19</sup> Snoqualmie Fish, Farm Flood, "Final Agreement Package," June 12, 2017. [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1/19/23. Page 14-19 [59-64].
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid. Page 7 [21] and Page 11 [37].