

SVAPD Agriculture Land Resource Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

This plan's scope of work was created by **Fish, Farm, Flood (FFF)**,¹ but it is also a **stand-alone agricultural plan** to guide support for agricultural needs² in the Snoqualmie Valley Agriculture Production District (SVAPD) over the next 25 years. In March 2019, the Agriculture Task Force was formed and convened by King County Agriculture Staff. The task force worked on the problems facing the commercial farming sector in the SVAPD in managing the agriculture land resource for farming productivity. The task force brings experience from farmers and industry professionals in the commercial farm sector:

- farmer organizations: SnoValley Tilth and Snoqualmie Valley Preservation Alliance,
- agency agriculture policy advisors: King County Agriculture Commission,
- special purpose districts: Snoqualmie Valley Watershed Improvement District and King Conservation District,
- educational institutions: Washington State University Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resources,
- and the FFF Implementation Oversight Committee (IOC).

The Task Force Scope of Work³ 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*
- 2) *Propose acreage to permanently protect for farming (also called out in Recommendation 32 and Farm 4 of the FFF agreement⁴).*

The **vision of this plan** is to elevate the land resource needs for infrastructure, policy, and regulatory improvements for commercial farmers in the SVAPD and King County so that farmers in the APD, policy makers and service providers can understand the agricultural needs based on facts, implement the solutions, and gain the results needed in the next 25 years.

The result is the Agriculture Task Force's recommendations that tackle the two goals of **Improved Farmland Productivity** and **Increased Farmland Protections** through 9 sub-goals and 17 short issue papers. The issue papers break out:

- the *current condition* of the issue through available data or original research,
- *background* information on the issue,
- the *desired condition* to achieve by 2048,
- as well as *strategies* to achieve that condition and
- a *timeline* to do so, and list the
- *service providers* to accomplish the work, and

- a designated *priority* to accomplish the work.

The Task Force has compiled **new and existing data** to highlight the composition of the SVAPD Agriculture Sector in order to share clear information **about the commercial farm enterprises and their land resource needs**. For example,

The rich, deep, irreplaceable soils, soil health,⁵ 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 enterprises⁶ 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.

The SVAPD is the 2nd 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 only 1,060 acres fallow, but farmable in the SVAPD. Within this zone there are 8,668 farmable⁷ acres and 6,263 unfarmable⁸ acres.

Acreage: what we found, what we recommend & how we compensate for this inevitable loss

The Task Force found very little available quality acreage to replace existing farmable acreage converted to other uses, and verified that nearly every farm is confronted with immediate infrastructure needs, so to compensate for the loss of farmable land to other uses, the Task Force Acreage Recommendation is to:

1. **Increase the productivity of 8,668 farmable acres through infrastructure improvements and protections** as captured in strategies and timelines within Issue Papers 1-17 in the Plan,
2. **Expand the APD** to the Southwest by 278 farmable acres to preserve additional farmable land and valuable habitat, and
3. **Gain Regulatory Relief** to permit more agricultural infrastructure improvements on farmable land while quickening the pace and lowering the cost.
4. **Ensure predominant use of agriculture in the SVAPD by protecting at least 7,696 farmable acres to be permanently preserved** within the next 25 years to and long-term, commercial agriculture viability in the SVAPD.
5. **Target eligible 3,789 farmable acres currently unprotected by FPP** with King County's Farmland Preservation Program deed.

Significant funding and action are needed to improve farmland productivity through 283 strategies, beginning with the highest priority issues. Some of the strategies are easily accomplished and some will need multi-benefit collaboration, political willpower, and financial support.

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.

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.

¹ In 2013, King County, the Tulalip Tribes, the Snoqualmie Tribe, several cities, multiple organizations and agencies, including farmers representing the King County Agriculture Commission, Snoqualmie Valley Preservation Alliance and later the Snoqualmie Valley Watershed Improvement Project and Sno-Valley Tilth joined forces to work on improving the Snoqualmie Valley APD landscape together through **Fish, Farm, Flood (FFF)**. One missing element needed in this work was a strategic plan for the agriculture land resource to complement and equal the balance of the strategic plans for Salmon Recovery and Flood Hazard Management and their implementation. So, in the FFF initial agreement and recommendations to the King County Executive in June 2017, was the creation of the Agriculture Strategic Plan Task Force.

See Snoqualmie Fish, Farm Flood for more information on this group and their work [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1/19/23. Especially Snoqualmie Fish, Farm Flood, “Final Agreement Package,” June 12, 2017. [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1/19/23. Page 14-19 [59-64].

² For more information about the other two plans that the Ag Strategic Plan is seeking to balance within FFF, see the Salmon Recovery Plan: Snohomish Basin Salmon Recovery Forum. June 2005. Snohomish River Basin Salmon Conservation Plan. Snohomish County Department of Public Works, Surface Water Management Division. Everett, WA. [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1/19/23. And the Flood Hazard Management Plan: King County. 2013. *2013 Flood Hazard Management Plan Update: King County, Washington*. King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, Water and Land Resources Division. Seattle, Washington. [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1/19/23.

³ Snoqualmie Fish, Farm Flood, “Final Agreement Package,” June 12, 2017. [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed 1/19/23. Page 14-19 [59-64].

⁴ Ibid. Page 7 [21] and Page 11 [37].

⁵ For more information on what soil health is and its importance, see the USDA NRCS [\[LINK\]](#). Accessed on 2/14/23.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Farmable classification is land that can be readily farmed. Farmable includes the sub-categories of currently farmed, fallow, and agriculture infrastructure.

⁸ 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.