



Agriculture and Forestry

Objective:

Encourage sustainable agriculture and forestry

What is happening in King County?

Farmlands

Currently there are 41,164 acres of zoned farmland that comprise the Agricultural Production Districts (APD) in the county. Some of the land in the APDs is not farmable due to wetlands, steep slopes and other conditions. Whether the rest of the APD lands are farmed depends largely on the interests, objectives and capabilities of the landowners. Therefore, about 24,000 acres (60 percent) in the APDs are actually farmed. In addition, there are 25,000 acres of land farmed in other areas of the county, mainly on Rural zoned land. Increased land prices, regulations, urban pressures, and drainage problems have all contributed to the reduction of farmland in King County compared to what it was historically; however, the number of acres being farmed has remained relatively stable in recent years and farming is still a vital presence.

King County has productive agricultural areas with dairies, livestock operations, crop farms and berry fields that provide an abundant local food source for thousands.

Forests

The Forest Production District (FPD), which is the county's designated forestland of long term commercial significance, covers over half the land area of King County. Currently there are 824,000 acres in the Forest Production District.

Total acreage in the FPD zoning designation is stable while land use patterns within the FPD are subject to change. Population growth puts pressures on the forest industry, as the land becomes more valuable for residential uses and encroaching development makes it more difficult to conduct forestry operations.

What role does King County play?

King County monitors the extent of agricultural and forest lands and provides programs to support sustainable farming and forestry practices. The county provides technical and marketing assistance to farmers and promotes agricultural practices that protect water quality and salmonid fisheries habitat. In both the Rural Area and the Forest Production District, King County encourages forest stewardship planning and active forest management as means of improving forest health and reducing conversion of forestland to other uses. King County also employs property tax incentives, transfer of development rights, grants, regulatory actions and community-based education to conserve the farm and forest land base and support agriculture and forestry as commercial activities.

King County's Rural Forest Commission offers policy guidance, identifies conservation strategies and promotes the practice of forestry in rural areas of the county. King County's Agriculture Commission gives farmers the opportunity to take an active role in land use decisions and in the development and evaluation of policies, regulations and incentives that can affect commercial agriculture in King County. Together these two commissions seek to integrate farm and forestry concerns into King County's operations and policies.

The King County Comprehensive Plan identifies areas of long-term commercial significance for agriculture and forestry. These designated Agriculture Production Districts and the Forest Production District are defined and regulated through zoning. The Comprehensive Plan also includes policies to promote and enhance the business of agriculture and forestry in these districts and the rural area.

King County also provides guidance and education directly to landowners through a new on-line resource, Forestry CPR.

What else influences these indicators?

A wide range of State and Federal policies, economic conditions, and the decisions of individual property owners affect land and resources conservation practices. Markets for agricultural and timber products, priorities of landowners, conservation incentives of the Farm Bill, and consumer preferences all bear on landowner decisions that affect conservation. A major challenge to maintaining agriculture in the county is the ability of farmers to find affordable land. The Farmland Preservation Program helps preserve agriculture by purchasing the development rights from farmland. This helps reduce the cost of farmland by discouraging other non-farm uses.

An analysis of private land ownership changes reveals that forestland in the Forest Production District (FPD) is gradually being subdivided and sold by large timber companies to smaller individual and commercial owners. The smaller parcels are more likely to be developed for residential purposes and not managed for commercial forestry. Government purchases of commercial forestland in the FPD in recent years also have tended to take land out of forest production.

What can you do?

- Develop a forest stewardship plan for your forested property
- Learn how to protect your home from wildfire and have a healthy forest too
- Consider enrolling protecting your forested land through a property tax reduction or transfer of development rights program
- Purchase local farm products. See a list of local farms
- Support local farm preservation efforts and consider enrolling in the Farmland Preservation Program
- If you own land that is not being farmed, consider enrolling it the FarmLink Program.

Related Links

An Evaluation of County Farmland Protection Programs in the Puget Sound Basin, King County Results

Farmland Programs in Washington

Technical Notes

Data provided by the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks

Charts and Maps

