

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL AGENDA BILLNO. AB2018-217

CLEARANCES	Initial	Date	Date Received in Council Office	Agenda Date	Assigned to:
Originator:	CE	7/11/2018	RECEIVED JUL 17 2018 WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL	7/24/2018	<i>Natural Resources</i>
Division Head:	WIP	7-12-18		7/24/18	Council
Dept. Head:	WIP	7-12-18		8/8/2018	Council
Prosecutor:	<i>[Signature]</i>	7-12-18			
Purchasing/Budget:					
Executive:	<i>[Signature]</i>	7.16.18			

TITLE OF DOCUMENT: Resolution regarding a 2018 update to the Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan – Discussion and Declaration of Support

ATTACHMENTS: Cover memo, proposed resolution, Whatcom County 2018 Agricultural Strategic Plan

SEPA review required? () Yes () NO
 SEPA review completed? () Yes () NO

Should Clerk schedule a hearing? () Yes () NO
 Requested Date:

SUMMARY STATEMENT OR LEGAL NOTICE LANGUAGE: (If this item is an ordinance or requires a public hearing, you must provide the language for use in the required public notice. Be specific and cite RCW or WCC as appropriate. Be clear in explaining the intent of the action.)

The Agricultural Advisory Committee and staff will present and discuss the Agricultural Strategic Plan. The proposed resolution declares support of the Strategic Plan, and affirms support for the County's Agricultural Program and Agricultural Advisory Committee. Additional information regarding the County's Agricultural Programs can be found at <http://whatcomcounty.us/1109/Agricultural-Program>.

COMMITTEE ACTION:

7/24/2018: Presented and forwarded to Council for approval

COUNCIL ACTION:

7/24/2018: Held in Council

Related County Contract #:

Related File Numbers:

Ordinance or Resolution Number:

Please Note: Once adopted and signed, ordinances and resolutions are available for viewing and printing on the County's website at: www.co.whatcom.wa.us/council.

SPONSORED BY: Planning
PROPOSED BY: Planning
INTRODUCTION DATE: _____

RESOLUTION # _____

**DECLARING THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S SUPPORT FOR
THE 2018 WHATCOM COUNTY AGRICULTURAL STRATEGIC PLAN**

WHEREAS, the Agricultural Advisory Committee was established under Whatcom County Ordinance 2001-036 and is governed by Whatcom County Code Chapter 2.34; and

WHEREAS, the Agricultural Advisory Committee is to provide review and recommendations to the Whatcom County Council on issues that affect agriculture, including assistance with establishment, promotion, and implementation of a comprehensive agricultural protection program; and

WHEREAS, the county has identified 100,000 acres as being the minimum acreage needed in farming to support a viable agriculture industry in Whatcom County (RES 2009-040); and

WHEREAS, the county has identified areas outside the roughly 87,500-acre Agriculture zone where agricultural land protection efforts should be strengthened (RES 2009-040); and

WHEREAS, the Agricultural Advisory Committee and staff were requested by the county to recommend options that strengthen farm land preservation policies in these areas (RES 2009-040); and

WHEREAS, the county has requested the Agricultural Advisory Committee's 2009 list of tools and strategies be further developed with recommendations made that enable implementation of these tools (RES 2009-040); and

WHEREAS, the Agricultural Advisory Committee conducted open public meetings in 2010-2011 to develop an Agricultural Strategic Plan that creates a road map, including specific tasks and priorities for implementing agricultural protection measures; and

WHEREAS, the Agricultural Advisory Committee unanimously voted to endorse the 2018 Agricultural Strategic Plan on May 9, 2018; and

WHEREAS, members of the Agricultural Advisory Committee and staff discussed the Strategic Plan with the County Council at the July 24, 2018 Natural Resources Committee meeting;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council hereby endorses this Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan, and commits to the time and resources necessary for its implementation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the County Council affirms the important role of the Agricultural Advisory Committee and Agriculture Program staff in developing recommendations for appropriate code changes and comprehensive plan amendments as identified in the Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan.

APPROVED this _____ day of _____, 2018

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
**WHATCOM COUNTY,
WASHINGTON**

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Rud Browne, Chairman

APPROVED as to form:



Civil Deputy Prosecutor

WHATCOM COUNTY

Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097
360-778-5900, TTY 800-833-6384
360-778-5901 Fax



Mark Personius, AICP
Director

Memorandum

TO: Honorable Whatcom County Councilmembers
Honorable Jack Louws, Whatcom County Executive

THROUGH: Mark Personius, Director, PDS *MP*

FROM: Chris Elder, Planner II *CE*

DATE: July 11, 2018

SUBJECT: Discussion and declaration of support for the updated Agricultural Strategic Plan

On behalf of the Agricultural Advisory Committee, I am pleased to deliver this Agricultural Strategic Plan and invite your participation with the committee in discussing its tasks and implementation on July 24, 2018. The enclosed materials also include a draft resolution through which you may choose to join the committee and Executive in voicing your commitment to this Plan.

This Plan is a result of Agricultural Advisory Committee members' work over the past year, with discussions held in their open public meetings between October 2017 and May 2018.

Also incorporated into this Agricultural Strategic Plan is an Agricultural Status Report which documents the degree to which active agricultural use and other uses are seen throughout the Agriculture zone and the Rural Study Areas (as identified in the 2007 Rural Lands Study). This report is intended to continue documenting conditions and changes within the agricultural landscape of Whatcom County.

Please contact Chris Elder at (360)778-5932 with any questions or concerns.

Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan

Recommended by the Agricultural Advisory Committee



Table of Contents

Overview	1
Letter from the Chair	2
Purpose & Objectives	3
Agricultural Programs	4
Public Outreach	11
Land Available for Agriculture	12
Measurements toward Progress	17
2018 Agricultural Status Report	18

Overview

Whatcom County Council approved **Resolution 2009-040** on July 7th, 2009 declaring the County Council's goals for Farmland Preservation, its priorities for consideration and adoption of policies to further farmland preservation, and requesting the County Administration to allocate staff support to accommodate this important policy initiative.

The Agriculture Strategic Plan was originally created to support the goals of this resolution and help direct Whatcom County Planning and Development Services, as well as other County Departments, in achieving the goals and supporting agricultural efforts throughout Whatcom County. This update continues those efforts.

This update of the Agricultural Strategic Plan coordinates and integrates the efforts underway through the:

- Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee
- Agricultural Advisory Committee
- Transfer of Development Rights/Purchase of Development Rights Workgroup
- Planning Commission
- County Council

Whatcom County Agricultural Advisory Committee

May 29, 2018

Whatcom County Executive
Whatcom County Courthouse, Suite 108
311 Grand Avenue
Bellingham, Washington 98225

Whatcom County Council
Whatcom County Courthouse, Suite 105
311 Grand Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225

Executive Louws and Council Members,

It has been seven years since the last update of the County Agricultural Strategic Plan. Actions have been taken and implemented on the plan adopted by the Council in June 2011. The primary work goal of the Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) this year was to complete a review of the 2011 strategic plan, identify updates, and submit our recommendations to the Council by the conclusion of our May meeting. We have met our goal by submittal of the accompanying report and recommendations therein.

One of the objectives identified in the 2011 plan was/is, "To ensure a minimum of **100,000 acres of land area available for agricultural use** to maintain the necessary land base to support an economically viable agricultural industry." The AAC recommends reaffirmation of this objective. We further recommend that this objective be made a standing goal or policy of the Council.

While this objective is certainly important to the maintenance of an economically viable agriculture industry in Whatcom County, the associated county policy framework/infrastructure must be aligned to complement that goal. Toward that end, the AAC recommends asking three filtering questions when considering ordinance changes that bear upon the agricultural strategic plan:

1. "Will this policy proposal support or hinder the implementation of the ag strategic plan?"
2. "Will this policy proposal support or hinder the maintenance of an economically viable ag sector in the county?"
3. "Will this policy proposal advance a careful balance between an economically viable ag sector and environmental objectives in the county?"

Chris Elder is an outstanding member of the county's professional staff. His support to the AAC has been exemplary, even knowing he has other assigned responsibilities within PDS. Staffing support for the AAC is critical to the importance of the County Agricultural Strategic Plan. The AAC advocates for additional staff support to assure timely attention to and completion of the elements of the agricultural strategic plan that have yet to be fulfilled (see Page 4 of the report). Such an investment on the part of the Council would underscore its commitment to sustaining an economically viable agriculture sector.

We stand ready to respond to any questions the Council may have regarding the report and recommendations. As indicated by letter early this year, we also stand ready to work with the Council and truly be a working, advisory committee.

Respectfully submitted:



Larry Davis, Chair
Agricultural Advisory Committee



Dave Buys, Vice Chair
Agricultural Advisory Committee

Signed on behalf of other Agricultural Advisory Committee members:

Lesa Boxx, Barb Hento, Anna Martin, Jeff Rainey, Kristi Roberts,
Jagjiwan Brar, Mike Hawley, Melodie Kirk, Matthew McDermott

Purpose: To describe the role Whatcom County Planning and Development Services will play in implementing an agricultural program consistent with County Council Resolution 2009-040 and Comprehensive Plan goals.

The **overall objectives** of Whatcom County Council as enacted by Planning and Development Services' agricultural program are:

1. To ensure a minimum of 100,000 acres of land are available for agricultural use to maintain the necessary land base to support an economically viable agricultural industry;
2. To advocate for policies and programs which support local solutions and balanced approaches that protect agricultural and natural resource needs in an effort to ensure economic viability;
3. To support agricultural planning efforts and production techniques that ensure local agricultural producers engage in strategic conversations about the connections between economic viability and local, state, and federal regulations, continuing to use the Agricultural Advisory Committee, the Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee, as well as other local agricultural groups;
4. To create and maintain strong, clear, concise, and effective land and water programs and regulations that benefit the agricultural industry and are in compliance with federal and state law;
5. To address policy and infrastructure shortcomings that impact local agricultural producers and businesses, such as farmworker housing;
6. To ensure sufficient physical and intellectual infrastructure, such as research and community education remain available to support the agricultural industry;
7. To support new and beginning farmers in acquiring farmland and support effective transition of farmland to the next generation of farmers; and
8. To effectively measure progress toward these objectives and communicate this with the population of Whatcom County.



Strong and Clear Agricultural Programs and Regulations

The overarching highest priority is the **continuance and maintenance of the “Agriculture Program” within the county government**. Continuing or additional staff support (a minimum of 1.0 FTE) is necessary in order to achieve momentum and continuity in pursuit of the agriculture program objectives. The amount and professional level of support available will determine both the timing and quantity of work achieved. Maintaining support for the AAC is a key part of an effective agricultural program, as well as the other subtasks below. Programs and priorities listed below were developed by the Agricultural Advisory Committee and reflect current ongoing programs and a prioritized list of efforts that the Agricultural Advisory Committee believes should be addressed to ensure the future of agriculture in Whatcom County.

Immediate Priorities:

- Designating Agricultural Lands of Long-term Commercial Significance
- Review Agriculture Zoning Code to ensure uses support and do not interfere with overall agricultural use of property and neighboring properties

Short-term Priorities (over the next 1 to 3 years):

- Review Rural Study Areas for additional protective measures
- Development of flexible policy framework that allows variable development actions that provide for protection of the best agricultural areas while supporting development at zoned densities

Medium-term Priorities (2 - 5 years):

- Natural Resource Marketplace

Long-term Priorities (3 to 10 years):

- Right to Farm Enforcement
- Water system planning & agricultural planning coordination
- Mitigation for the loss of agricultural land
- Improved coordination with partner agencies to support improved agricultural permit review

Ongoing Programs:

- Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program
- Current Use Assessment through Open Space Taxation Act



Ongoing Programs:

Responding to the loss of County farmland, Whatcom County Executive initiated the development of a Purchase of Development Rights Program in September of 2001. A PDR Advisory Committee comprised of farmers, citizens and conservation organizations was instructed to

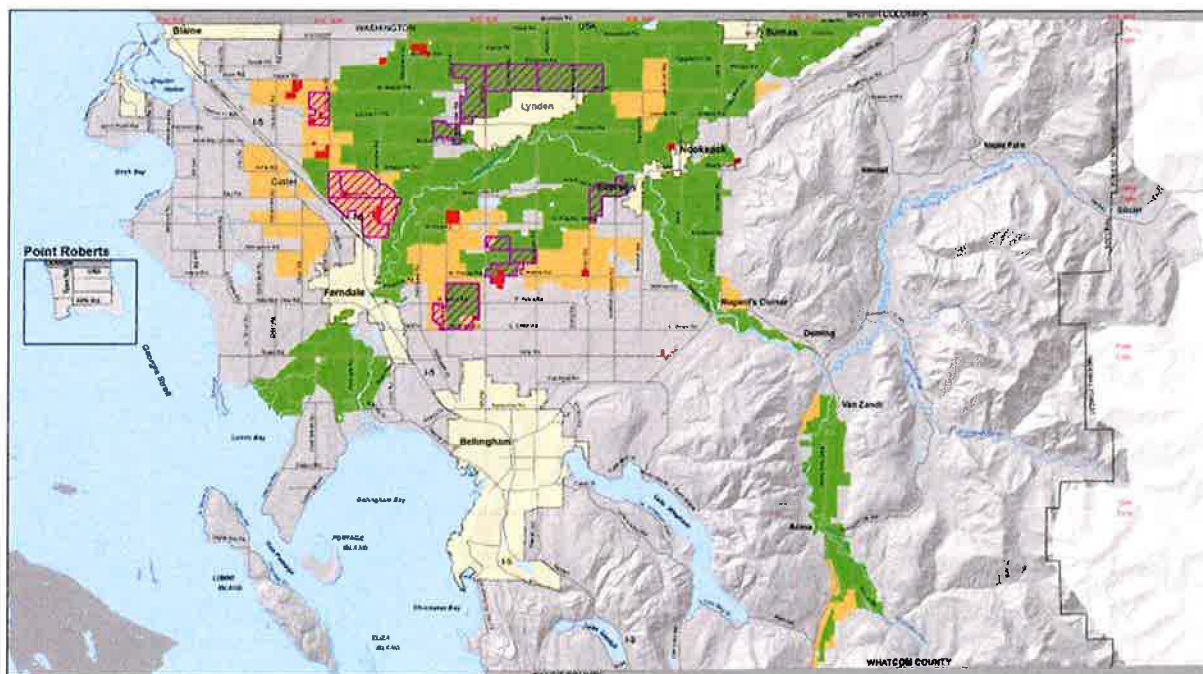


PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS PROGRAM

assist County staff in developing a proposal for County Council consideration. The PDR Program offers a voluntary tool for the preservation of productive agricultural land in the County that will:

- Provide farmers with the market based economic value for agricultural land without selling the land.
- Support and promote ongoing agricultural activity by offering an attractive option for farmers and land-owners.

All applicants for the PDR Program must be within an Agriculture or Rural zoning designation. Valid applications are reviewed to determine if the acquisition of development rights will promote the PDR program's goals and priorities. Selection criteria have been developed to guide, but not control, the review and assessment of eligible properties. Applications are scored based on factors such as soil type and classification, size of parcel (s), number of development rights offered, proximity to other conserved lands, percent farmed, water rights availability, as well as conservation and historical significance.



Whatcom County

- Purchase of Development Rights 2017

- Rural Study Areas
- Agriculture Zone
- PDR Target Areas
- Purchased

Map of Whatcom County showing the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program areas for 2017. The map displays various land designations: Rural Study Areas (yellow), Agriculture Zone (green), PDR Target Areas (pink hatched), and Purchased areas (red). Key locations labeled include Lynden, Nookville, Fannelle, Bellingham, and various bays and rivers. An inset map shows the location of Point Roberts.

Ongoing Programs:

Current Use Tax Assessment under Open Space Taxation Act as defined in Chapter 84.34 RCW

- Open Space Farm and Agricultural Land
- Open Space Land Farm and Agriculture Conservation

The Open Space Taxation Act, enacted in 1970, allows property owners to have their open space, farm and agricultural, and timber lands valued at their current use rather than at their highest and best use. The Act states that it is in the best interest of the state to maintain, preserve, conserve, and otherwise continue in existence adequate open space lands for the production of food, fiber, and forest crops and to assure the use and enjoyment of natural resources and scenic beauty for the economic and social well-being of the state and its citizens.

Open Space Farm & Agricultural Land (OSAG)

Farm and Agricultural land is defined as either:

1. Any parcel of land that is 20 or more acres or multiple parcels of land that are contiguous and total 20 or more acres and are:
 - a. Devoted primarily to the production of livestock or agriculture commodities for commercial purposes
 - b. Enrolled in the federal conservation reserve program or its successor administered by the United States department of agriculture
 - c. Other similar commercial activities as may be established by chapter 458-30 WAC.
2. Any parcel of land that is five acres or more but less than twenty acres, is devoted primarily to agricultural uses, which has produced a gross income from agricultural uses equivalent to:
 - a. Prior to January 1, 1993, \$100 or more per acre per year for three of the five calendar years preceding the date of application for classification.
 - b. On or after January 1, 1993, \$200 or more per acre per year for three of the five calendar years preceding the date of application for classification.
3. Any parcel of land that is five acres or more but less than 20 acres, is devoted primarily to agricultural uses, and has standing crops with an expectation of harvest within:
 - a. Seven years and a demonstrable investment in the production of those crops equivalent to \$100 or more per acre in the current or previous calendar year.
 - b. Fifteen years for short rotation hardwoods and a demonstrable investment in the production of those crops equivalent to \$100 or more per acre in the current or previous calendar year.
4. For parcels of land five acres or more but less than 20 acres, "gross income from agricultural uses" includes, but is not limited to, the wholesale value of agricultural products donated to nonprofit food banks or feeding programs.
5. Any parcel of land less than five acres devoted primarily to agricultural uses and has produced a gross income of:
 - a. Incidental uses compatible with agricultural purposes, including wetland preservation, provided such use does not exceed 20 percent of the classified land.
 - b. Land on which appurtenances necessary for production, preparation, or sale of agricultural products exist in conjunction with the lands producing such products

THIS PROPERTY IS
DESIGNATED
OPEN SPACE

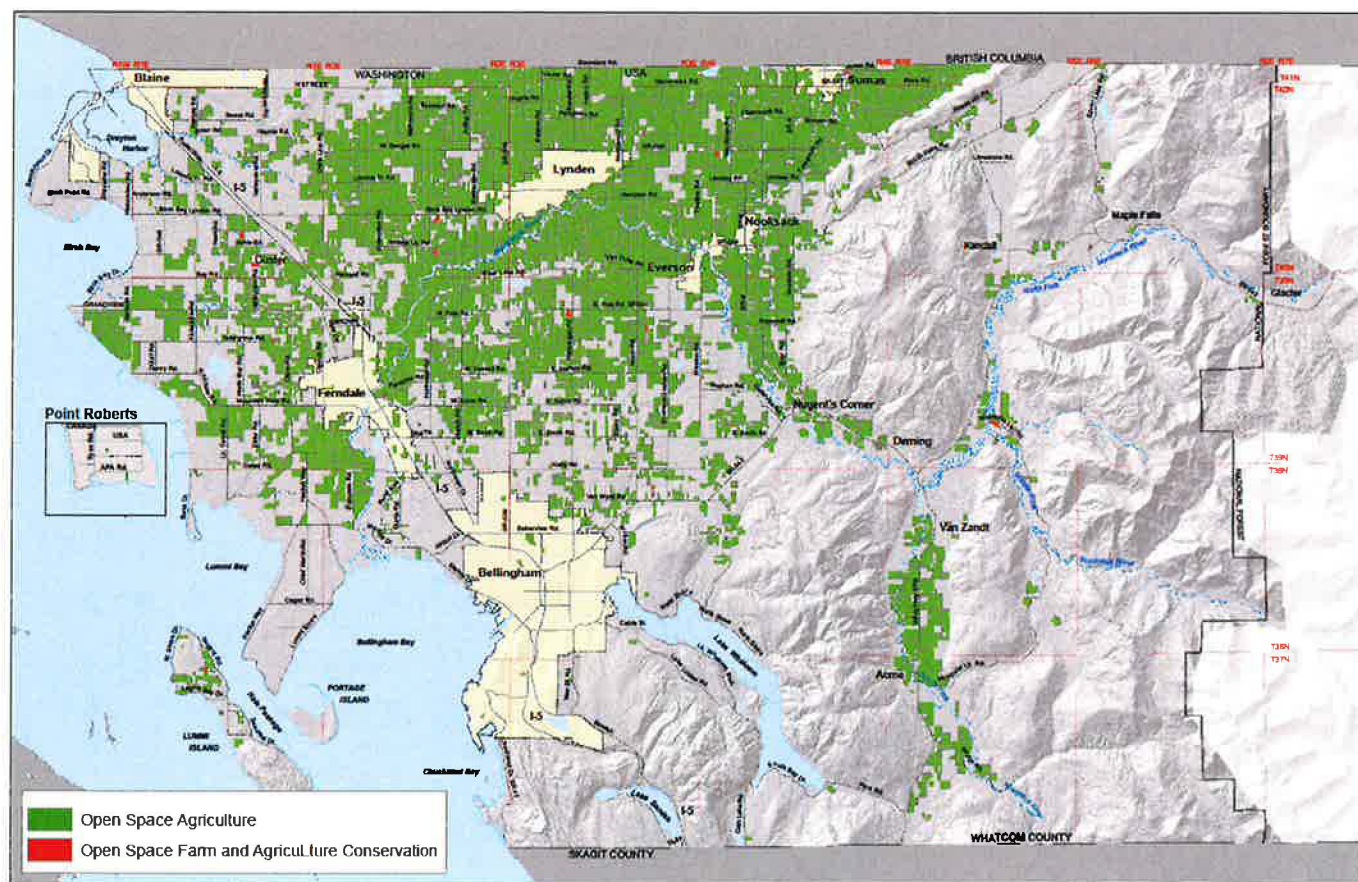
PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS
OF RCW 84.34, PUBLIC ACCESS
IS PERMITTED FOR RECREATIONAL
PURPOSES SUBJECT TO THE TERMS
AND CONDITIONS OF WHATCOM
COUNTY OPEN SPACE AGREEMENT No.

- c. Any non-contiguous parcel one to five acres, that is an integral part of the farming operation.
- d. Land on which housing for employees or the principal place of residence of the farm operator or owner is sited provided the use of the housing or residence is integral to the use of the classified land for agricultural purposes, the housing or residence is on or contiguous to the classified land, and the classified land is 20 or more acres.
- e. Land that is used primarily for equestrian-related activities for which a charge is made, including, but not limited to, stabling, training, riding, clinics, schooling, shows, or grazing for feed. Depending on the number of classified acres, the land may be subject to gross income requirements.
- f. Land that is primarily used for commercial horticultural purposes, including growing seedlings, trees, shrubs, vines, fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs, and other plants in containers, whether under a structure or not. For additional criteria regarding this use, please refer to RCW 84.34.020(2)(h).

Open Space Land Farm and Agriculture Conservation (OSFACL)

Farm and Agriculture Conservation Land is defined as any land meeting the definition of “farm and agricultural conservation land,” which means either:

- a. Land previously classified under the farm and agricultural classification that no longer meets the criteria and is reclassified under open space land; or
- b. “Traditional farmland,” not classified, that has not been irrevocably devoted to a use inconsistent with agricultural use, and that has a high potential for returning to commercial agriculture.



Immediate Priorities:

Designating Agricultural Lands of Long-term Commercial Significance

As part of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update process, additional language was added to Policy 8A-3.

Policy 8A-3 states that the criteria for designating or de-designating lands under the Agriculture land use designation shall be considered on an area-wide basis. When applying the following criteria, the process should result in designating an amount of agricultural resource lands sufficient to maintain and enhance the economic viability of the agricultural industry in the county over the long term, and to retain agricultural support businesses, such as processors, farm suppliers, and equipment maintenance and repair facilities. One of the criteria was updated to better reflect language from the Washington State Growth Management Act and the updated language is contained below.

3. The land has long term commercial significance for agriculture. In determining this factor, consider the following nonexclusive criteria:
 - a. The majority of the area contains Prime Farmland Soils as determined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).
 - b. The area may contain 100-year floodplains as delineated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
 - c. Land use settlement patterns, the intensity of nearby uses, and the history of approved land development permits are generally compatible with agricultural practices.
 - d. A majority of the area is composed of agricultural operations that were historically in agriculture prior to 1985.
 - e. The predominate parcel size in the area is large enough to adequately maintain agricultural operations.
 - f. The availability of public services.
 - g. The availability of public facilities such as roads used to transport agricultural products.
 - h. Special purpose districts that are oriented to enhancing agricultural operations such as drainage improvement, watershed improvement, and flood control exist.
 - i. The area has a pattern of landowner capital investment in agricultural operations improvements including irrigation, drainage, manure storage, the presence of barns and support buildings, enhanced livestock feeding techniques, agricultural worker housing, etc.
 - j. The area contains a predominance of parcels that have current use tax assessment derived from the Open Space Taxation Act.
 - k. The area's proximity to urban growth areas.
 - l. The area's proximity to agricultural markets.
 - m. Land value under alternative uses.

The Agricultural Advisory Committee will review lands in Whatcom County to determine if the designation of agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance is accurate based on these updated criteria.

Immediate Priorities:

Review Agriculture Zoning Code to ensure uses support and do not interfere with overall agricultural use of property and neighboring properties.

There are many uses currently allowed within the Agriculture District through permitted, accessory, administrative approval, and conditional use permits. The AAC would like to review these uses to determine whether uses support and do not interfere with agricultural activities in this zone. The Agriculture District zoning code can be found in Chapter 20.40 of the Whatcom County Code.

**Short-term Priorities (over the next 1 to 3 years):****Review Rural Study Areas for additional protective measures**

Work with the AAC and greater community to identify if any new or changed zoning designations are needed, building on the direction outlined in Resolution 2009-040. Once identified clearly and in accordance with RCW 36.70A.170, implement – write draft ordinance to change development regulation language, zoning maps, and/or Comprehensive Plan language.

Flexible Policy Framework

The AAC believes there needs to be a flexible policy framework that allows variable development actions that provide for the protection of the best agricultural areas while supporting development at zoned densities. The AAC supports continued examination of a parcel reconfiguration tool as one development action option.

Medium-term Priorities (2 - 5 years):**Natural Resource Marketplace**

Work with the AAC and other relevant groups on water issues, density credit program development, and other planning-related incentive programs that have the potential to use the marketplace to compensate farmers for the services they provide. This effort was initiated primarily due to farmers' comments that they would be willing to trade off their ability to develop their land in exchange for obtaining the legal right to water.

Long-term Priorities (3 to 10 years):**Right to Farm Enforcements**

The AAC recommendation is to review the Right to Farm ordinance to make it more effective at the farm level. Work items under this task include looking at strengthening farmers' recourse against those who bring failed lawsuits against them, coordination with law enforcement with regard to complaints from nearby non-farming neighbors and to require title companies and real estate professionals to effectively communicate this ordinance with land purchasers.

Water system planning & agricultural planning coordination

The County should pursue a comprehensive water supply plan that includes out-of-stream uses including irrigation and other agricultural water needs. Agriculture program staff need to coordinate to ensure the water needs of the agricultural community are incorporated into future water planning efforts.

Mitigation for the loss of Agricultural land

The AAC has expressed the desire to explore agricultural mitigation options and potential regulations. Currently there is the perception that critical area concerns override agricultural concerns. Agricultural lands are lost due to conversions of the land to development, critical areas banking, and other types of conversions. The agricultural mitigation task would entail the development of policy recommendations to govern all conversions away from agricultural land.

Improved Coordination with partner agencies to support agricultural permit review

Project implementation for agricultural projects can be challenging for producers when multiple agency review is required. The AAC recommends continued coordination with the multiple partner agencies to improve agricultural permit review processes.



Public Outreach, Input and Education

Public committees are an invaluable resource for county staff and policy makers. The agricultural community sees potential changes to county agricultural policies and regulations continuing to go through the Agricultural Advisory Committee for recommendations, and Purchase of Development Rights policy and transaction recommendations continuing to go through the PDR Oversight Committee. State Growth Management law requires early and continuous public involvement, and these committees are an important way to engage the farming community (and others interested) on a regular basis in planning-related agricultural issues.

When it comes time to engage a broader audience in programs or regulatory discussions, farmers recommend outreach and publication in their news outlets, and when possible, in-person discussions at meetings already attended by those in the farming community. Outreach should provide opportunities for farmers to talk with other farmers about their experiences related to county programs.

Maintaining these committees also provides the broader public outside the agricultural community to engage in discussions related to agricultural programs, policies, and regulations. They are welcomed and accommodated through open public meetings of both advisory committees, as well as the formal public processes that occur as changes make their way through the Planning Commission and County Council.

Tasks

- **Maintain regular meetings of Agricultural Advisory Committee**
- **Maintain regular meetings of PDR Oversight Committee**
- **Publish and distribute the Natural Resource Newsletter at least twice per year**
- **Support outreach discussions with agricultural groups and the community at large**

Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan

In August of 2016, Whatcom County Council adopted the updated Comprehensive Plan. In Chapter 8, Resource Lands, goals related to Agriculture include:

Goal 8A: Conserve and enhance Whatcom County's agricultural land base for the continued production of food and fiber.

Goal 8B: Maintain and enhance Whatcom County's agricultural product industry as a long-term and sustainable industry.

Goal 8C: Preserve and enhance the cultural heritage that is related to agriculture.

Goal 8D: Reduce land use conflicts between Whatcom County's agriculture and non-agricultural landowners.

Goal 8E: Work with agricultural land users to find efficient and effective cooperative ways to protect and improve habitat of threatened and endangered species through education and incentive programs.

Goal 8F: Strive to ensure adequate water supplies to support a thriving agricultural sector.

Each Comprehensive Plan goal provides direction to County staff and residents as to the priorities of Whatcom County. Policies listed under each goal provide additional guidance as to how to meet each goal. Look at Appendix B for the complete Agricultural Resource Land excerpt from the 2016 Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.

Land Available for Agricultural Use

Whatcom County has identified the minimum of agricultural land necessary to be available for agricultural use as 100,000 acres, in order to keep the agricultural industry – and those businesses that support it – economically viable.

According to the 2012 AgCensus, there are: (See Page 20-21 for additional 2012 AgCensus information)

- 1,702 farms in Whatcom County
- growing crops on 115,831 acres
- contributing to an overall farmgate value of \$357 million dollars.

These statistics place Whatcom County as one of the top 10 agricultural economies in Washington State and one of the top 3 agricultural economies in the Puget Sound region.

In order to address the 100,000 acre goal, an understanding of terms relating to agriculture must be described.

- **What is agriculture?**

Agriculture is defined as the science or practice of farming, including growing crops and raising animals for the production of food, fiber, fuel and other products. Agriculture in Whatcom County consists of a diversity of crop types including dairy, raspberry, blueberry, seed potatoes, mixed vegetables, beef, tree fruits, and several other crop types.

- **What does it mean for land to be “available for agricultural use”?**

Land is generally characterized as being available for agricultural use if the land could be farmed. This indicates that streams, forests, wetlands, and non-farm related homes and businesses would be unavailable for agricultural use.

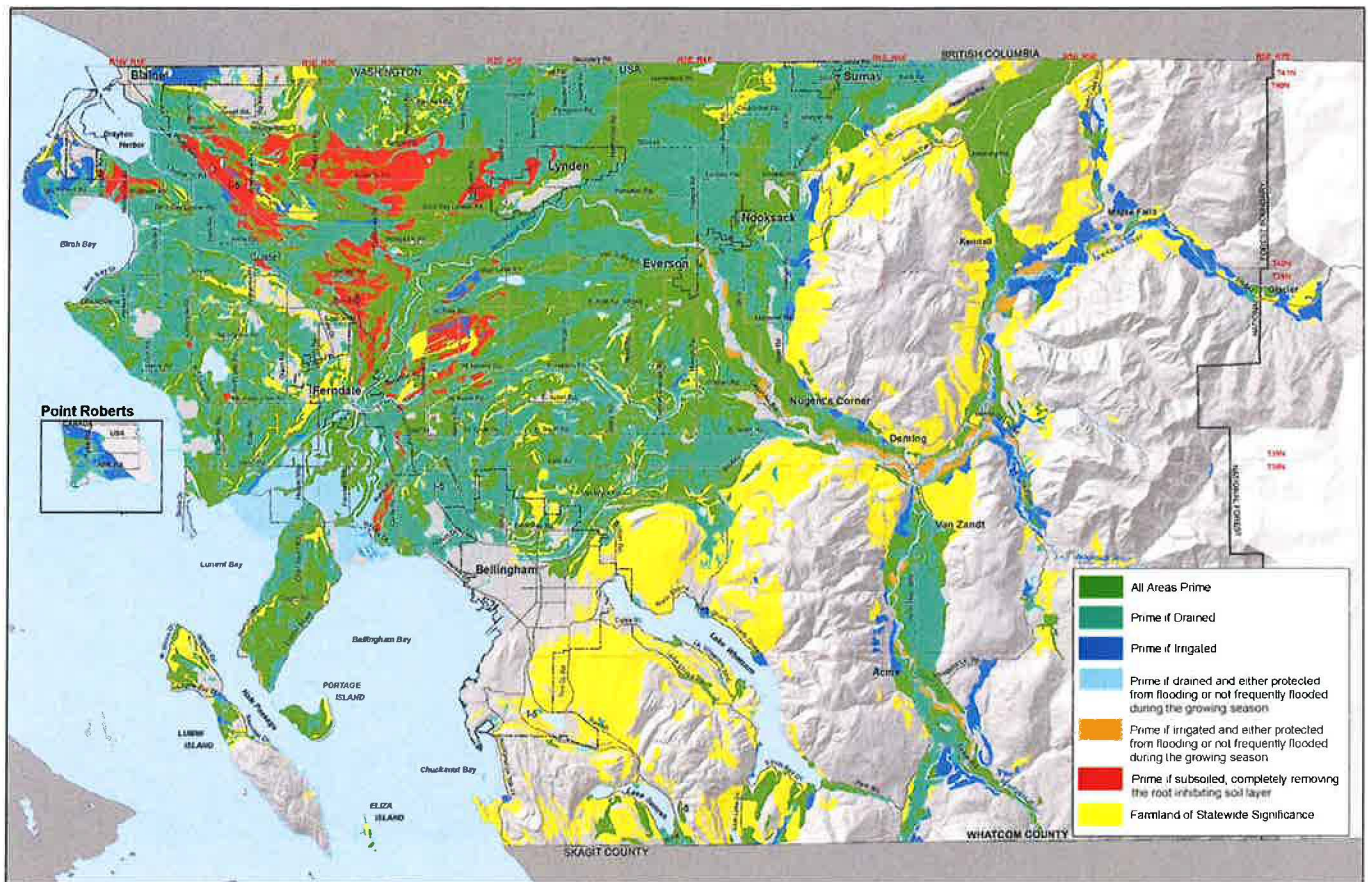
According to the US Department of Agriculture:

A **Farmer/Rancher** is an owner and/or operator who has a vested interest in the operation of the farm or ranch.

A **beginning farmer** is defined as one who:

- Has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years
- Does not own a farm or ranch greater than 30 percent of the average size farm in the county as determined by the most current Census for Agriculture

Prime Soils in Whatcom County



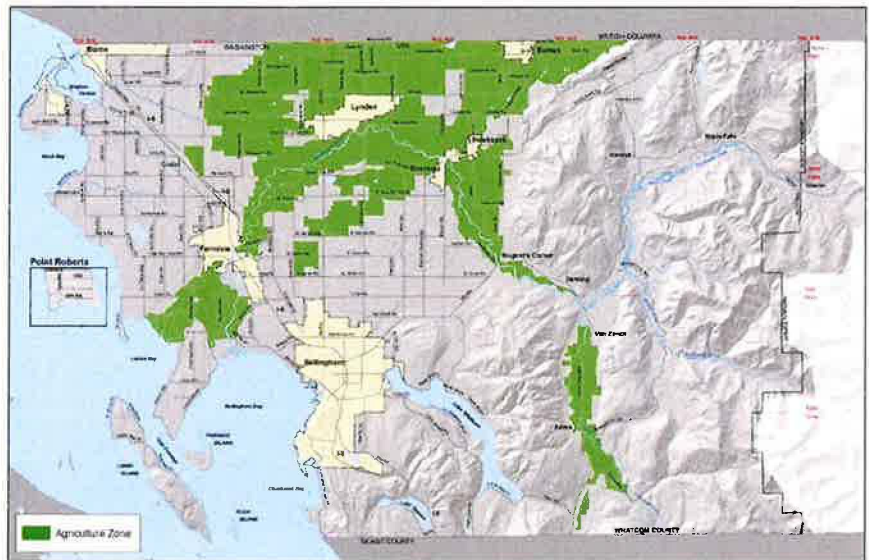
Prime farmland is one of several kinds of important farmland defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is of major importance in meeting the Nation's short- and long-range needs for food and fiber. Because the supply of high-quality farmland is limited, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recognizes that responsible levels of government, as well as individuals, should encourage and facilitate the wise use of our Nation's prime farmland (Soil Survey of Whatcom County Area, Washington, USDA, Soil Conservation Service, 1992).

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) policy and procedures on prime and unique farmlands are published in the "Federal Register," Vol. 43, No.21, January 31, 1978, p.4030 through p. 4033. This document states that prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to acceptable farming methods. In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air. Prime farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time, and they either do not flood frequently or are protected from flooding.

Agriculture Zone

The **Agriculture Zone** consists of **87,353 acres** as of May, 2018. This is down from 87,525 acres in 2011, when the Agriculture Strategic Plan was originally adopted. This loss in acreage is due to expansion of small cities located adjacent to the Agriculture Zone. The purpose and allowed uses within the Agriculture Zone are described in Whatcom County Code Chapter 20.40. The primary purposes of this district are to implement the agricultural designation of the Comprehensive Plan, established pursuant to RCW 36.70A.170, preserve, enhance and support the production of food and fiber in Whatcom County, to maintain a sufficiently large agricultural land base to ensure a viable agriculture industry and to maintain the economic feasibility of supporting services.

Policy 8A-3: The criteria for designating or de-designating lands under the Agriculture land use designation shall be considered on an area-wide basis. When applying the following criteria, the process should result in designating an amount of agricultural resource lands sufficient to maintain and enhance the economic viability of the agricultural industry in the county over the long term, and to retain agricultural support businesses, such as processors, farm suppliers, and equipment maintenance and repair facilities. The criteria are as follows:



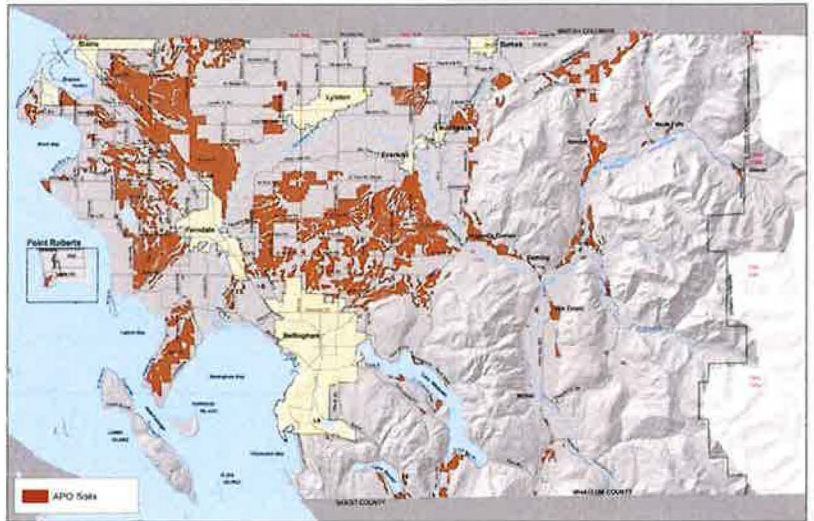
1. The land is not already characterized by urban growth. In determining this factor, the County should consider WAC 365-196-310 and RCW 36.70A.030(19).
2. The land is used or capable of being used for agricultural production. In making this determination, the County shall use the land-capability classification system of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. These eight classes are incorporated into map units and are based on the growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land.
3. The land has long term commercial significance for agriculture. In determining this factor, consider the following nonexclusive criteria:
 - a. The majority of the area contains Prime Farmland Soils as determined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).
 - b. The area may contain 100-year floodplains as delineated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
 - c. Land use settlement patterns, the intensity of nearby uses, and the history of approved land development permits are generally compatible with agricultural practices.
 - d. A majority of the area is composed of agricultural operations that were historically in agriculture prior

to 1985.

- e. The predominate parcel size in the area is large enough to adequately maintain agricultural operations.
- f. The availability of public services.
- g. The availability of public facilities such as roads used to transport agricultural products.
- h. Special purpose districts that are oriented to enhancing agricultural operations such as drainage improvement, watershed improvement, and flood control exist.
- i. The area has a pattern of landowner capital investment in agricultural operations improvements including irrigation, drainage, manure storage, the presence of barns and support buildings, enhanced livestock feeding techniques, agricultural worker housing, etc.
- j. The area contains a predominance of parcels that have current use tax assessment derived from the Open Space Taxation Act.

Agriculture Protection Overlay

The purpose of the Agriculture Protection Overlay (APO), fully defined in Whatcom County Code Chapter 20.38, is to maintain and enhance commercial agricultural activity and further protect open space resources within Whatcom County; further the county's efforts in meeting long-term agricultural needs; provide a reasonable mix of uses and activities which may enhance the economic resources available to the farm; and provide for a variety of uses within the rural areas which are not inconsistent with or incompatible with the use of lands within the area for agricultural activities.



The Agriculture Protection Overlay applies to parcels:

- Located within any Rural 5 or 10 zone
- larger than 20 acres
- containing more than 50% APO soils

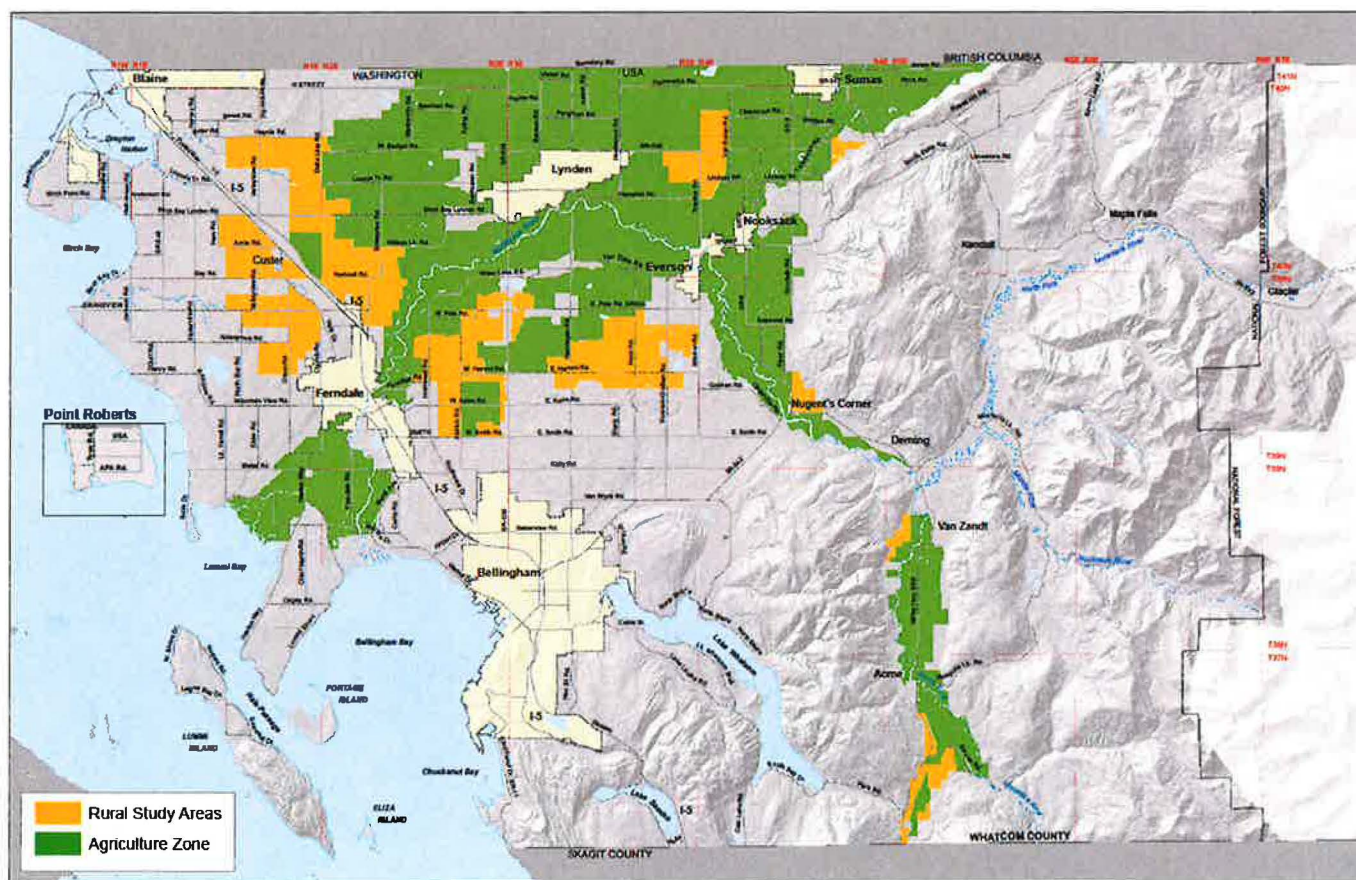
Parcels meeting the above criteria wishing to subdivide are required to cluster densities and maintain a large agricultural reserve tract, consisting of at least 75% of the original parent parcel. The intent of this code was to maintain a large agricultural area while allowing for development at the density allowed by the zoning code.

Rural Study Areas

The Whatcom County Rural Land Study: A Collaborative Report Identifying Rural Areas of Agricultural Significance was completed in 2007. The primary objective of the rural land study was to identify and map areas within the Rural 5 and 10 Zones that are of agricultural significance and may require additional protection to ensure long-term agricultural viability. Project data was collected that included air photos, APO Soils, Critical Areas, Assessor data, Purchase of Development Rights Target Areas, and NOAA Coastal Change Analysis Program (2004) data based on Landsat Images (2000). The Agricultural Advisory Committee, in conjunction with PDS staff, identified 9 rural areas comprising over 21,000 acres that have high agricultural value. In 2012, the rural study areas were re-evaluated and a total 10 rural areas were identified representing 25,407 acres.

The criteria for establishing these areas includes a consideration of :

- Proximity to active agricultural areas
- Current land use characterized by Agriculture
- High percentage of APO soils
- Parcelization of the area
- Land use as identified on Assessors records
- Evaluation of forested areas for potential agricultural use



Measurements toward Progress

By tracking basic information related to agriculture and reporting results on a regular basis, Whatcom County can provide a valuable service to the agricultural community. There is no known source of compiled multi-agency data on agricultural issues in Whatcom County, yet data is a critical component to measuring progress. The county could compile data from other sources and make it available in a user friendly way to the broader community. Periodically, the county could add new data gleaned from staff GIS analysis. The information would relate back to the Agriculture program objectives in order to know whether programs and policies are achieving the intended results.

Some of the indicators useful for providing an agricultural status report include:

1. Mapping of land currently in agricultural use – Methods used would be consistent with land characterization effort underway by Planning and Development Services described in Appendix F; reported as new aerial photos become available
2. Permits - Agricultural building permits and new single family residential permits in Agriculture Zone and Rural Study Areas, available on an annual basis
3. New irrigation water rights issued, available through the Department of Ecology
4. Exempt wells installed for domestic and agricultural use
5. Market value of agricultural products sold – US Agricultural Census
6. Number of Agricultural Advisory Committee meetings held, Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee meetings held, and other opportunities for public participation related to the agricultural program
7. Area of farms enrolled with WA Dept. of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency or Whatcom Conservation District in a farm planning program
8. Incentive program participation including Open Space Farm and Agriculture current use taxation, Purchase of Development Rights program, and others
9. Acreage and changes in acreage of various cropping types

Tasks associated with performing this assessment include:

- Mapping agricultural lands based on Whatcom County aerial photos
- Compiling data and publishing an agricultural status report

The Agricultural Status Report for the years 2000 through 2017 has been completed and included as part of this 2018 Agriculture Strategic Plan (Pages 19 - 25).



2018 Agricultural Status Report (pages 18 - 26)

The following pages contain the 2018 Agriculture Status Report using indicators and measurements identified during the Agriculture Strategic Plan development process. Throughout this report, AG Zone refers to the Agriculture Zone and RSA refers to Rural Study Areas.

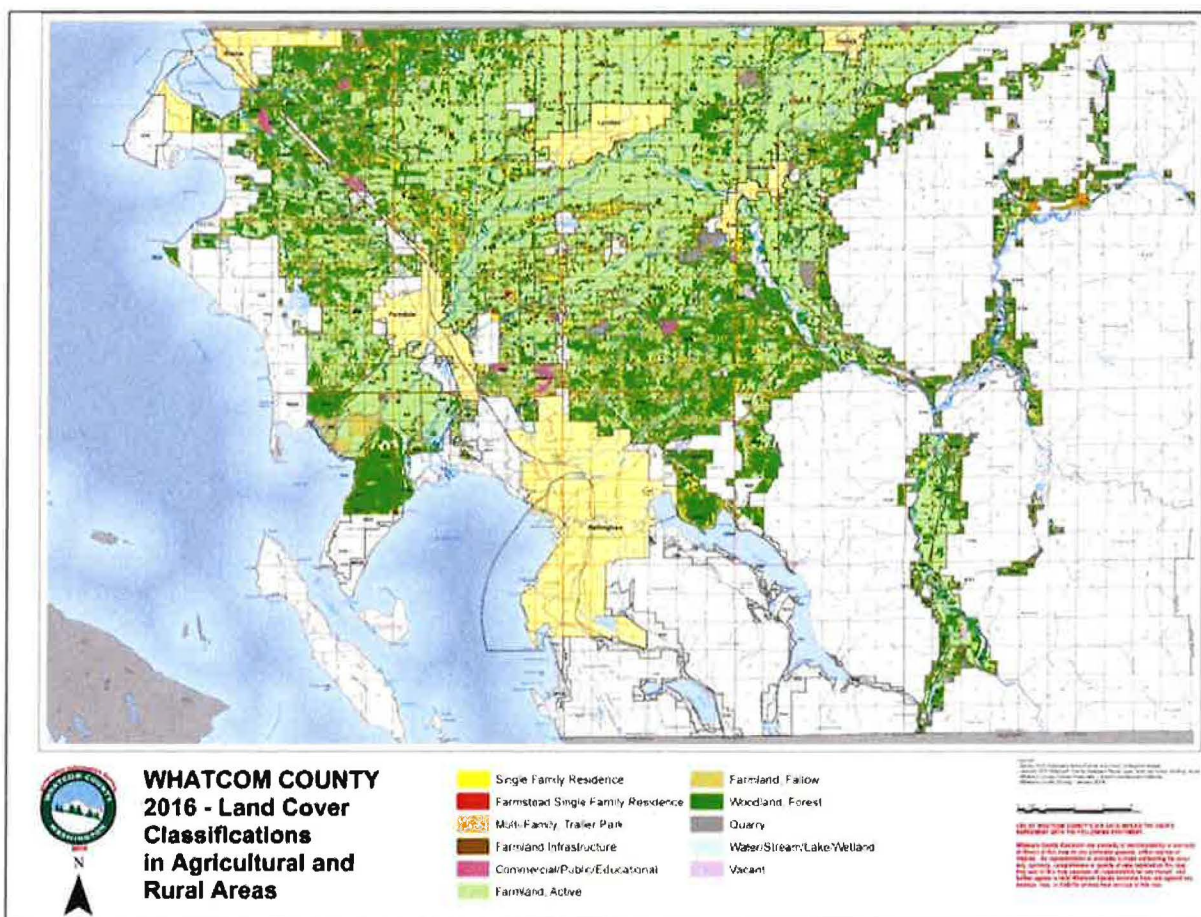
1. **Mapping of land currently in agricultural use – Methods of land characterization effort by Planning and Development Services described below; new aerial photos are higher resolution and increase accuracy as compared to previous years.**

Data used for the land characterization effort include:

- Pictometry aerial photos, oblique and 4-6 inch ortho-corrected images
- NAIP aerial imagery, 1 meter—very little detail
- Whatcom County Assessor Parcel Layer, land use codes, building values
- Whatcom County Critical Areas data—stream corridors and wetlands
- Whatcom County Zoning
- 2000 Land Cover Designations, LandSat

(Item type and description contained in Appendix C)

Land Cover	(acres)	(acres)
AG Zone	2012	2017
Active	82,426	82,852
Fallow	4,809	4,639
Infrastructure	3,835	3,907
Farmstead Home	2,939	2,979
RSA	2012	2017
Active	13,641	13,559
Fallow	522	489
Infrastructure	712	718
Farmstead Home	816	836

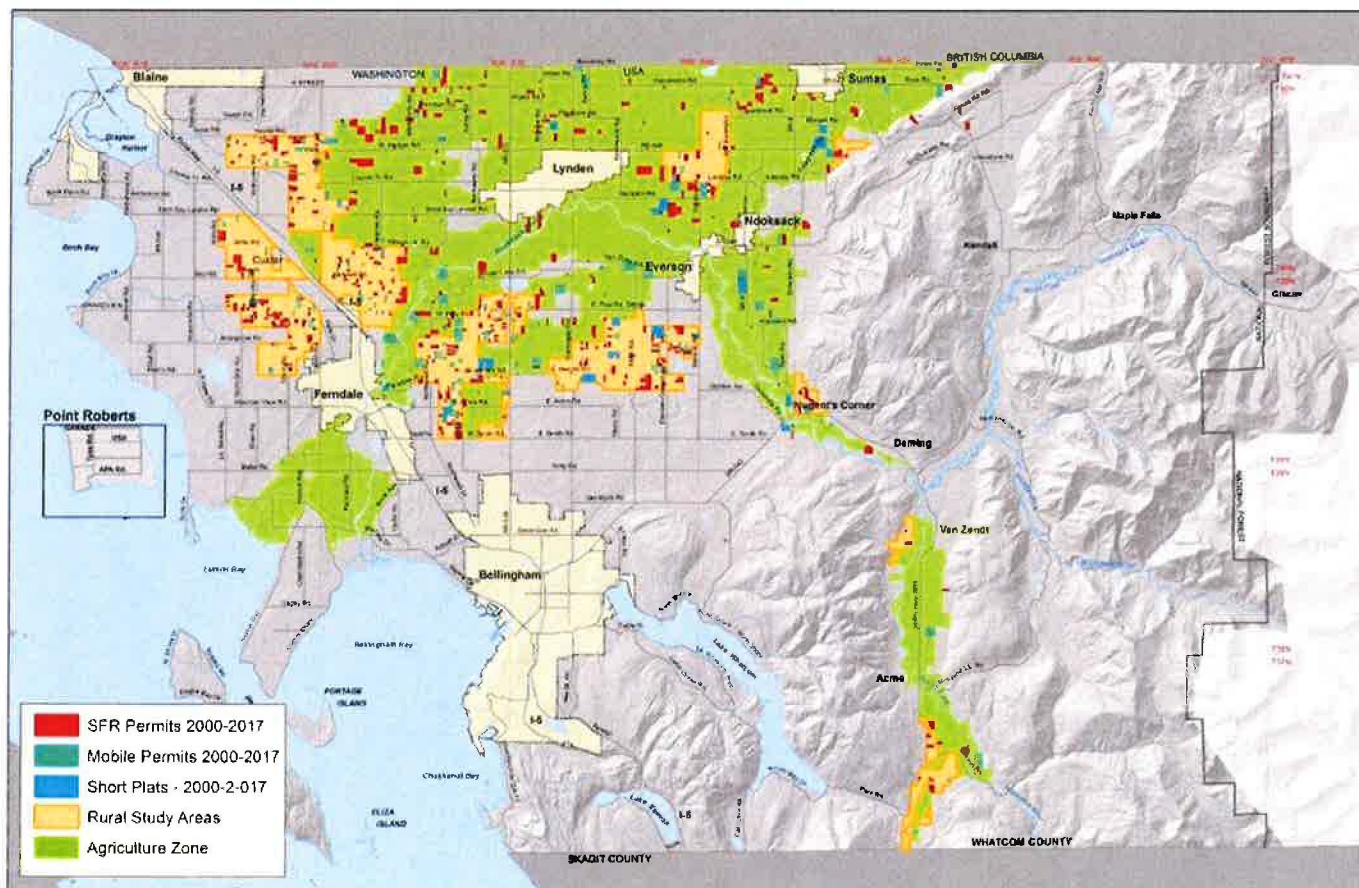


2. Permits - Agricultural building permits and new single family residential permits in the Agriculture zone and Rural Study Areas, available on an annual basis.

Whatcom County Code Title 20 Zoning is intended to further the goals and policies of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan by providing the authority for and procedures to be followed in regulating the physical development of Whatcom County, through coordinating the execution of both public and private projects with respect to all subject matters utilized for developing and servicing land.

The table presented depicts the number SFR (single family residences), Mobile (mobile homes), and Short Plat (land divisions of up to 5 new lots). For the purposes of this Ag Strategic Plan, permits approved have been grouped by the time period before the original Ag Strategic Plan (2000—2009) and between the original and this updated Ag Strategic Plan (2010—2017). For future Agricultural Status Reports, every year will be tracked independently. It should also be taken into account that the Ag Zone represents approximately 87,353 acres and the Rural Study Areas represent 25,407 acres, therefore the number of permits issued have different relative impacts on the overall agricultural neighborhood.

Permits Issued	(# of permits)	(# of permits)
AG Zone	2000 - 2009	2010 - 2017
SFR	132	42
Mobile	49	14
AG Short Plat	1	16
RSA	2000 - 2009	2010 - 2017
SFR	249	127
Mobile	90	26
Short Plat	36	7



2018 Agricultural Status Report

3. New irrigation water rights issued, available through the Department of Ecology.

It is the understanding of staff that no new permanent irrigation water rights have been issued by the Washington State Department of Ecology since before the last Agricultural Strategic Plan was completed.

4. Exempt wells installed for domestic and agricultural use

A comprehensive assessment of exempt wells installed for domestic and agricultural use has not yet been completed. Once a more comprehensive assessment has been completed this information will be included in future Agriculture Status Reports.

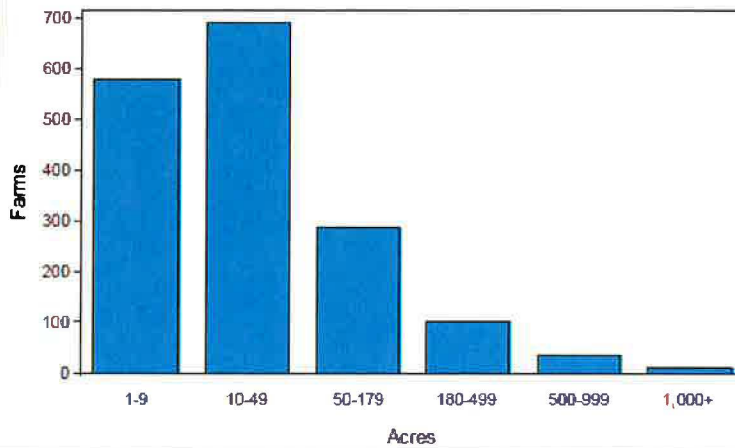
5. Agricultural Census Data of Whatcom County {2012 & 2007, USDA}

(including Skagit, Snohomish, King Counties for context)

Whatcom County leads in both increases in the total number of farms and acres farmed among these Puget Sound Counties.

Item	Year	Whatcom	Skagit	Snohomish	King
Number of Farms	2012	1,702	1,074	1,438	1,837
Number of Farms	2007	1,483	1,215	1,670	1,790
% change in Number of Farms	2012 to 2007	+ 15 %	- 12 %	- 14%	+ 3 %
Land in Farms	2012	115,831	106,538	70,863 acres	46,717 acres
Land in Farms	2007	102,584	108,541	76,837 acres	49,285 acres
% change in Land in Farms	2012 to 2007	+ 13 %	- 2 %	- 8 %	- 5 %
Average Size of Farms	2012	68 acres	99 acres	49 acres	25 acres
Average Size of Farms	2007	69 acres	89 acres	46 acres	28 acres
% change in Average Farm Size	2012 to 2007	- 1 %	+ 11 %	+ 7 %	- 11 %
Market Value of Products Sold	2012	\$357,312,000	\$272,275,000	\$139,486,000	\$120,749,000
Market Value of Products Sold	2007	\$326,450,000	\$256,248,000	\$125,619,000	\$127,269,000
% change in Market Value	2012 to 2007	+ 9 %	+ 6 %	+ 11 %	- 5 %
Crop Sales	2012	\$119,816,000	\$201,007,000	\$63,216,000	\$44,012,000
Livestock Sales	2012	\$237,496,000	\$71,268,000	\$76,270,000	\$76,737,000
Average Sales per farm	2012	\$209,937	\$253,515	\$97,000	\$65,732
Average Sales per farm	2007	\$220,128	\$210,904	\$75,221	\$71,100
Average age of principal operator	2012	57.4	58.4	58.5	57.1
Principal operators by primary occupation (2012)					
Farming		773	515	511	814
Other		929	559	927	1023

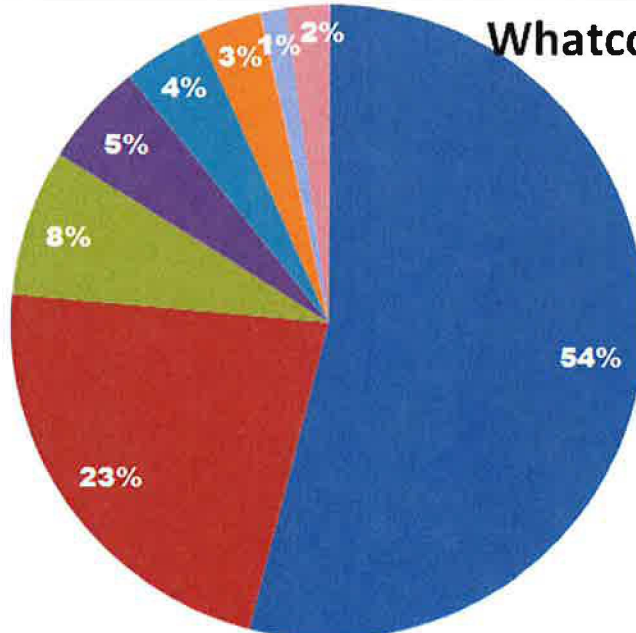
Farms by Size, 2012



Farms by size: 2012	Number of Farms
1 to 9 acres	578
10 to 49 acres	693
50 to 179 acres	287
180 to 499 acres	101
500 to 999 acres	33
1,000 acres or more	10

Commodity	# Farms	Market Value (2012)	Percent
Dairy products	114	\$ 193,042,000	54%
Fruits, Nuts & Berries	252	\$ 79,978,000	22%
Cattle, calves	520	\$ 26,535,000	7%
Nursery	40	\$ 18,697,000	5%
Poultry, eggs	201	\$ 14,641,000	4%
Vegetables	101	\$ 11,693,000	3%
Grain	71	\$ 4,687,000	1%
All other *	403	\$ 8,039,000	2%
Total	1,702	\$ 357,312,000	100%

Whatcom Agriculture by Commodity



- Dairy products
- Fruits, Nuts & Berries
- Cattle, calves
- Nursery
- Poultry, eggs
- Vegetables
- Grain
- All other *

6. Number of Agricultural Advisory Committee meetings held, Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee meetings held, and other opportunities for public participation related to the agricultural program

- The Agricultural Advisory Committee has a scheduled 7 meetings annually
- The Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee has a scheduled 11 meetings annually
- The Transfer of Development Rights/Purchase of Development Rights Workgroup met 14 times between March 2017 and June 2018

7. Area/Number of farms enrolled with Washington Department of Agriculture(WSDA), Whatcom Conservation District or Whatcom County in a farm planning program (As of May 2018)

- WSDA reports 98 licensed dairies have certified farm plans on 32,800 acres
- WCD reports that 89 farm plans were completed in 2017
- Whatcom County reports 149 farms have participated in the Conservation Program on Agricultural Lands

8. Incentive program participation:

A. Current use taxation

2017 Current Use Assessment Enrollment	
Open Space Farm and Agricultural Land	106,258
Open Space Farm and Agriculture Conservation Land	244

B. Incentive program participation: Purchase of Development Rights program, and others.

The PDR Program has completed 19 agricultural conservation easements representing the protection of 919 acres extinguishing 130 development rights. The PDR Program is currently working with an additional 18 PDR applicants representing an additional 943 acres. Whatcom County Council has approved staff to move forward towards completion of 7 of these applications.

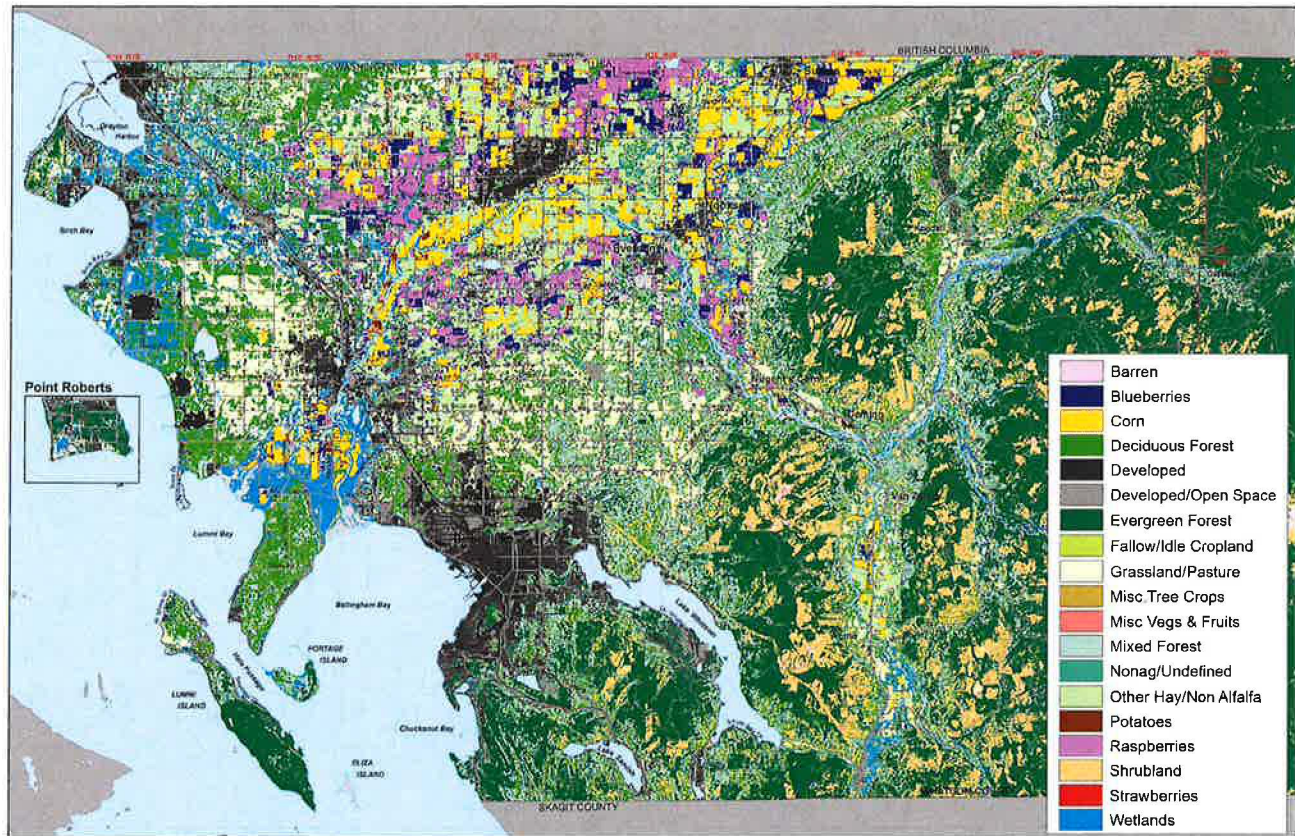


PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS PROGRAM

PDR Program Progress To-Date

Closing	Zoning	Water Rights?	Protected Acres	# of Dev Rights	Cost of Purchase	Match Committed \$	Match Source	Conservation Futures Committed \$	Additional Expenses (Closing, Monitoring, Appraisal)	Avg Cost/Ac	Avg Cost to County/Ac (inc. closing, monitoring, appraisal)	Avg Cost/DR
4-Aug	R5A	N	39.62	7	\$480,000.00	\$240,000.00	USDA	\$240,000.00	\$31,724.91	\$6,057.55	\$6,858.28	\$34,285.71
5-Feb	R5A	N	39.4	7	\$230,200.00	\$115,100.00	USDA	\$115,100.00	\$18,389.31	\$2,921.32	\$3,388.05	\$16,442.86
5-Dec	R5A	N	157	31	\$710,000.00	\$355,000.00	USDA	\$355,000.00	\$35,336.06	\$2,261.15	\$2,486.22	\$11,451.61
6-Jun	R5A	Partial	91	18	\$1,065,000.00	\$532,500.00	USDA	\$532,500.00	\$50,488.69	\$5,851.65	\$6,406.47	\$29,583.33
7-Jun	R10A	N	39.88	3	\$170,000.00	\$85,000.00	USDA	\$85,000.00	\$15,387.74	\$2,131.39	\$2,517.25	\$28,333.33
7-Sep	AG	N	39.18	2	\$315,000.00	\$157,500.00	USDA	\$157,500.00	\$22,072.60	\$4,019.91	\$4,583.27	\$78,750.00
7-Sep	AG	N	124.74	2	\$325,000.00	\$162,500.00	USDA	\$162,500.00	\$23,176.53	\$1,302.71	\$1,488.51	\$81,250.00
8-Jan	R5A	Y	40.38	8	\$255,000.00	\$127,500.00	USDA	\$127,500.00	\$19,265.21	\$3,157.50	\$3,634.60	\$15,937.50
8-Oct	R5A	N	19.7	3	\$185,000.00	\$92,500.00	USDA	\$92,500.00	\$16,727.71	\$4,695.43	\$5,544.55	\$30,833.33
8-Oct	AG	N	39.1	2	\$260,000.00	\$130,000.00	USDA	\$130,000.00	\$14,883.90	\$3,324.81	\$3,705.47	\$65,000.00
8-Oct	R5A	N	10.7	1	\$115,000.00	\$57,500.00	USDA	\$57,500.00	\$12,521.54	\$5,373.83	\$6,544.07	\$57,500.00
9-Nov	R5A	Y	30.5	5	\$310,000.00	\$155,000.00	RCO	\$155,000.00	\$21,769.32	\$5,081.97	\$5,795.72	\$31,000.00
2011	R5A	Y	107	21	\$680,000.00	\$340,000.00	USDA	\$340,000.00	\$36,128.60	\$3,177.57	\$3,515.22	\$16,190.48
2013	R5A	Y	36.93	6	\$150,000.00	\$75,000.00	USDA	\$75,000.00	\$12,877.21	\$2,030.87	\$2,379.56	\$12,500.00
2013	R5A	Y	11.25	2	\$70,000.00	\$35,000.00	USDA	\$35,000.00	\$10,325.03	\$3,111.11	\$4,028.89	\$17,500.00
2014	R5A	Y	39.17	7	\$135,000.00	\$67,500.00	USDA	\$67,500.00	\$9,898.47	\$1,723.26	\$1,975.96	\$9,642.86
2017	AG	N	19.4	1	\$80,000.00	\$40,000.00	SWF	\$40,000.00	\$20,528.29	\$2,061.86	\$3,120.01	\$40,000.00
2017	AG	N	14.5	1	\$85,000.00	\$42,500.00	SWF	\$42,500.00	\$20,537.35	\$2,931.03	\$4,347.40	\$42,500.00
2018	R5A	Y	19.7	3	\$100,000.00	\$100,000.00	USDA/RCO	\$0.00	\$23,232.11	\$6,255.44	\$1,179.29	\$41,077.37
TOTALS:			919	130	\$5,720,200	\$2,910,100		\$2,810,100	\$392,038.47	\$3,124.24		\$22,480.80

9. Acreage and changes in acreage of various cropping types (2017) (turn landscape)



Washington Cropland Data Layer, also known as CropScope, has been developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Research and Development Division (RDD), Geospatial Information Branch (GIB), Spatial Analysis Research Section (SARS). Additional information can be found at www.nass.usda.gov. The purpose of the Cropland Data Layer Program is to use satellite imagery to (1) provide planted acreage estimates to the Agricultural Statistics Board for the state's major commodities and (2) produce digital, crop-specific, categorized geo-referenced output products.

*When reviewing the table on the next page, please note that the acreages are estimates based on satellite imagery as described above and is not intended to be used as exact figures.

	2008 AG Zone	2014 AG Zone	2017 AG Zone		2008 RSA	2014 RSA	2017 RSA
Alfalfa	16	65	8			2	1
Apples		44	32			3	2
Barley	266	36	12		1	1	
Barren	466	499	838		8	46	112
Blueberries **			9,433				1,156
Blueberries/Raspberries*	11,949	15,638			1,633	1,921	
Clover/Wildflower		50				1	
Corn	11,467	16,418	13,906		580	852	602
Cranberries	159	6			25	1	
Developed - Open Space	1,813	1,536	1,594		1,731	1,702	1,713
Developed - Low Intensity	2,909	3,056	3,070		1,526	1,569	1,597
Developed - Med. Intensity	473	500	578		148	160	177
Developed - High Intensity	228	229	260		68	68	75
Fallow/Idle	3	2,208	102			54	9
Forest, Deciduous	2,797	3,969	3,599		1,966	3,053	2,898
Forest, Evergreen	1,792	1,194	1,320		1,309	891	856
Mixed Forest	2,930	2,222	2,463		1,651	1,597	1,702
Grasses/Pasture+	28,714	21,747	5,663		11,049	11,475	6,481
Hay - non alfalfa+	11,126	10,574	22,046		718	473	3,111
Herbaceous Wetlands	3,086	963	3,043		420	193	821
Other Crops	34	48	120			10	3
Other Tree Crops		181	81			4	20
Peas	50		3		2		
Potatoes	878	1,314	659		23	22	36
Raspberries**			11,519				1,624
Shrubland	1,549	1,151	1,941		582	664	797
Sod/Grass	7	97	111				6
Sorghum	66		29		1		14
Strawberries	2	302	15		9	60	2
Water	755	1,027	961		18	20	23
Winterwheat	107	20	23		1	1	
Woody Wetlands	3,645	2,148	3,754		2,437	1,057	2,048
Xmas Trees	1	46	105			6	20

+ Grasses/Pasture and Other Hay - non alfalfa categorized differently in 2017

* 2008/2014 - blueberries and raspberries combined

** 2017 - blueberries and raspberries counted separately



Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan 2018

