

Washington State Department of Agriculture

Future of Farming Study Recommendations

Category 1: MAKE AGRICULTURE A PRIORITY:

Farming needs to be given the priority it merits by the citizens and lawmakers of Washington. Farmers are stewards of much of the state's land and of the esthetic values of the countryside, provide food for the citizens of Washington and many other people around the world, and are a major contributor to the state's economy.

- Provide an environment conducive for Washington's agricultural producers, agribusinesses and new agricultural products and services.
- Annually assemble agency and industry leadership to discuss topics such as: regulatory framework, land, water, labor, transportation, research, education, energy, and public sector's role in enhancing the business environment.
- Create and financially support a strategic and tactical agricultural economic development program carried out in partnership with the agriculture industry focusing on the findings of the Future of Farming strategic plan.
- Evaluate other states' agricultural coalition strategies to determine which have been most productive. Identify the Washington implementation agent that may be appropriate for positive coalition leadership and strategy development
- Direct state funded entities impacting agriculture to consider impacts on the agriculture industry as a unified system
- Foster creative solutions and innovation from within agriculture, within the state or from other states and countries

Category 2: ELIMINATE REGULATORY BARRIERS:

Assess and reform the accumulated and complex regulations impacting agriculture to promote the competitiveness of farming in Washington.

- Establish a Blue Ribbon Panel to evaluate the impact of regulations on agricultural production, processing, profitability and competitiveness to mitigate duplication, contradiction, unintended consequences and other factors burdening the system.
- Assure reasoned decisions that do not disadvantage the competitiveness of Washington agriculture.
- Direct regulatory agencies to provide outreach and educate producers and processors about rule and regulation requirements. Increase efficiencies through providing concise, accurate summaries of applicable rules in writing.

- Direct regulatory agencies that have overlapping authority to meet annually to discuss industry compliance issues, share their educational outreach presentations, and to ensure the rules and interpretation of the rules are consistent.
- Construct a model Agricultural Impact Statement that can be used to assess and document the effect of state agency actions prior to their implementation.
- Implement streamlined application and reporting processes to minimize redundant paperwork and simplify applications for licenses and permits.

Category 3: PROTECT RESOURCES

Policymakers need to ensure that farming has access to the key resources necessary to keep it viable. Among these the most critical are: land, water, labor, and electricity and other energy sources.

LAND: The availability of productive and affordable land is essential to the continuation of agriculture.

- Support the work of the Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP).
- Protect Open Space Taxation for farmland.
- Encourage county efforts under GMA to maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries.
- Improve enforcement and outreach consistent with the intent of Right to Farm Laws.
- Increase the understanding by public officials of the long-term negative fiscal impact of farmland conversion.
- Ensure that state-owned and managed working lands use agricultural Best Management Practices to protect adjacent farms and ensures environmental stewardship.

AGRICULTURAL WATER: Competing demands threaten to reduce farming's access to the water needed to produce, pack, process, and distribute the state's farm products.

- Conduct a state-wide assessment and prioritize projects for investment readiness; identify and apply for appropriate funding.
- Change relinquishment statute to reward irrigation efficiencies and other best practices without removing water from agricultural land.
- Develop watershed and other local level water resource management programs to continue water conservation, drainage, transfers, and irrigation efficiencies.
- Upgrade and improve the antiquated water distribution, drainage and irrigation infrastructure.
- Continue current efforts to identify, evaluate, and develop increased water availability including storage capacity, flexibility, and reuse.

LABOR: *The availability of the labor force that is vital to conducting many farming activities is threatened.*

- Expand current migrant worker housing efforts and encourage producers, non-profit housing suppliers, and the private housing sector to replicate successful models.
- Reform unemployment insurance and workers' compensation (L&I) programs to prevent uncompetitive increases in employers' costs.
- Petition the federal government for a viable and predictable process ensuring sufficient numbers of legally authorized agricultural workers.
- Amend labor laws to allow youth to work hours compatible with school vacations and consider tourist or intern program models found successful in other regions or counties.
- Reform mandated increases in labor compensation laws that may make agriculture uncompetitive.

ENERGY: *Rising costs of electricity and other energy sources put our competitive advantage in jeopardy*

- Continue to encourage and incentivize the development and adoption of conservation and energy-efficient, and energy generating technologies for agriculture, particularly for the use of liquid fuels.
- Protect and promote current and potential energy and distribution sources (dams, windmills, methane digesters, etc.) that provide Washington agriculture a competitive advantage, and be ready to look ahead and respond.
- Encourage the development and adoption of alternatives to imported fertilizer, including more efficient use technologies and alternative sources.
- Increase the availability of natural resources such as land and water so that producers are better able to meet the increasing demand for renewable fuel crops in addition to the traditional food, fiber, feed, and forage.

CAPITAL AND CREDIT

- Work to assure adequate long-term capital and short-time credit for the state's farmers and agribusinesses at reasonable cost.

Category 4: STRENGTHEN SUPPORT SERVICES

The future competitiveness of farming in Washington requires strengthened support services.

EDUCATION: *Re-commit to agriculture and food system education infrastructure.*

- Invest in vocational and higher education agriculture programs.
- Engage the agriculture industry to be proactive on solutions and to identify skill gaps and opportunities for current and future producers, processors, and workers.

- Assess the performance of existing programs, increase flexibility of agricultural education programs to meet changing needs of the industry, and identify new strategies to recruit industry producers, processors and employees.
- Focus efforts to make career and job opportunities in agriculture known to young people.
- Continue and increase food system awareness programming in K-12 curriculum.
- Disseminate research based information concerning the full range of food system supply to all Washington residents and decision-makers so that they are able to make informed personal choice and political decisions.
- Promote beginning farmers and succession planning programs.

TRANSPORTATION: *Assure the future of Washington's reliable and cost effective multi-modal system through collaboration with other agricultural and commercial allies to support initiatives and coalitions.*

- Continue to support WSDOT's Freight Transportation Strategy and finish authorized transportation projects for which funding have been approved. Focus on transportation modes that most efficiently address the state's producers and processors: rail, rivers and roads.
- Make quality of service a condition of state funding for rail projects.
- Work with federal, regional, state and private investors to improve the efficiency of the state's transportation infrastructure, its overall capacity and the ease of access to export ports, including air for highly perishable, high-value products, and rail yards. For example, increase truck weight limits by adding a 3rd axle, allowing 20% greater capacity.
- Improve rural farm service roads and bridges to handle increased loads.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT: *Innovation is key to agricultural viability in Washington.*

- Recognize the industry need for enhanced publicly funded agricultural research and associated transfer of findings that will permit Washington agriculture to remain competitive.
- Increase state-funded support for food and agricultural research in recognition of the size and complexity of the state's industry.
- Develop public-private partnerships to fund the development and renovation of agricultural research facilities.

PROCESSING /PREPARATION: *A strong processing sector is vital to profitable production.*

- Provide leadership and outreach to support the symbiotic relationship between a vibrant processing sector and retention of farmers. This includes both higher profile processing such as milk, and for value adding activities such as seed conditioning, apple packing, grain storage, animal/meat processing, etc.

MARKETING SERVICES: *The future of farming in Washington will be heavily influenced by how successful agriculture is in enhancing its local, regional and global marketing efforts.*

- Enhance local, regional, and global marketing efforts and support, including compliance assistance and provision of timely and cost efficient inspection, certification and documentation of products for domestic and international sales.
- Launch a “Grown in Washington” program in partnership with industry, including producers, processors, retailers and educators (closely aligned with economic development).
- Maximize capabilities in market intelligence, analysis, promotion and support to serve current and emerging global markets for which Washington has strong competitive advantages, coordinating actions with existing capacities when possible.
- Encourage and support industry innovation to identify all demand-led production, value added and niche potentials.
- Continue to develop Washington’s deserved reputation for quality agricultural products.

INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH: *Apply the breadth of trusted communication modes to the advantage of Washington’s dispersed agriculture industry and to consumers.*

- Improve the understanding of farming’s story both within the industry and by legislators, regulators, labor agents, consumers, environmentalists, and natural resource managers through information disseminated by agencies, industry associations and commodity commissions.
- Leverage information and trusted communication modes to educate producers, potential producers, and processors about how to operate effectively in the agriculture business environment.

PRODUCER ASSOCIATIONS AND FORMAL COMMISSIONS: *Leverage the expertise and trusted messenger role of industry associations and commissions.*

- Continue and enhance capability to proactively identify and communicate innovative and new products, markets, technologies and processes that sustain profitable production.
- Encourage associations and commissions to continue to assess the relevance of current goals and programs.
- Investigate ways in which they can facilitate a more timely adoption of new computing and telecommunication advances to best assist farmers.

Category 5: HARNESS EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

Prosperity of farming in Washington will depend in part on the industry’s ability to recognize and tap into emerging opportunities in a timely manner. The future is unknown, but there is evidence that the factors below merit acknowledgement, monitoring and appropriate industry response.

ORGANIC, SUSTAINABLE AND LOCAL: *Leverage the increased interest for products grown by organic, local farmers, and future developments, into demand sufficient to market the products at the required prices.*

- Continue to promote consumption of locally grown products, institutional buying of Washington products.
- Provide and enhance the regulatory and advisory structure to assure the integrity of the state's organic production.
- Enhance research, extension, and teaching in organic and alternative production and marketing of agricultural products.
- Encourage consolidation of definition and certification requirements for "sustainability."

INFLUENCE OF MULTI YEAR FARM BILLS: *The 2008 Farm Bill added millions of dollars for specialty crops.*

- Advocate for Washington agriculture in the development of new Farm Bills.
- Leverage the Farm Bill programs.
- Identify the USDA programs and state level service providers capable of assisting producers and processors to access all Farm Bill resources.

FOOD SAFETY AND FOOD SECURITY: *Consumer demand for products requiring handling and protection is increasing; therefore the programs for regulation and education must adapt proportionately.*

- Examine how federal and state agencies and industry organizations can better share knowledge, technology, processes or protocols to enhance the safety of all food produced in Washington and safeguard the competitive advantage of Washington's outstanding food safety reputation.
- Assess the role and opportunities that Washington can take in both local and global food security including plant and animal disease.

CLIMATE CHANGE: *Washington producers have adopted many resource conservation practices for decades. New perceptions and concerns regarding climate change can be addressed through similar processes.*

- Implement approaches for farmers to receive benefits from practices and / or ecological goods and services that they may develop or provide.
- Develop systems to allow voluntary farmer participation in carbon markets and carbon offset or other credits.
- Encourage additional conservation through best practices such as energy conservation, conversion to lower water use crops or varieties, and more efficient conveyance and application systems as appropriate responses to potential climate change.

- Continue to investigate the potential negative consequences of climate change, including policy, on agriculture, such as water availability, flooding, increase in invasive species, and fuel allowance tax offsets

RISK MANAGEMENT: *Volatility of the industry indicates that the future of agriculture is partially dependent upon using the tools of risk management.*

- Train educators and producers in methods to more effectively evaluate and manage risks that jeopardize profitability.
- Work more closely with USDA's Risk Management Agency and other programs to identify the special risks faced by Washington farmers and gaps in current programs that need to be filled.