

**Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Workgroup Meeting #25 Summary
September 15, 2016 4:00 – 6:00 PM
Washington State Farm Bureau offices**

In attendance:

Stephen Bramwell

Jim Goche, Friendly Grove Farms

Kelly McClain, WSDA

Aslan Meade, EDC

Bruce Morgan

Jim Myers

Theresa Nation, WDFW

Rick Nelson, TCFB/Grange

Kevin J. O'Sullivan, TCFB

Greg Schundler, WSU Ext (Mason)

Evan Sheffels, WSFB

Kelly Smith, EDC Intern

Sierra Smith, CNLM

Jerilynn Walley, SPSSEG

Kathleen Whalen, TCD

Staff: Maya Buhler, Charissa Waters, Brad Murphy, Neil Aaland

Welcome and Introductions: Facilitator Neil Aaland opened the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves; he then reviewed the agenda. Jim Goche asked for an update on the Open Public Meetings Act issue. Neil said John Stuhlmiller raised this at the Statewide Advisory Committee/Technical Panel meeting in early August; at this meeting Ron Shultz said he had discussed this with their AAG. Neil will send the meeting notes for that meeting around to this group. Brad Murphy said their legal counsel thinks this workgroup is not an agent of the county, but rather is operating under the authority of the Conservation Commission.

Update on agricultural viability subcommittee work

Jim Myers summarized the recent subcommittee meeting. There are gaps in some of the data needed to describe viability. Jim Goche noted there are a couple of key documents. One of them is a document that describes 5-6 key elements of agricultural viability. A key idea is that you need an agricultural economy for viability. The subcommittee looked at some documents from the Washington State Department of Agriculture. Jim thought the documents aren't as helpful for Thurston, given the work we've done. The subcommittee proposal is a two track approach. First part is a market approach; second part is a "social values" approach.

Rick asked what is meant by social values; he wondered how it would help his operation. Jim Goche thought it would help him by addressing topics such as food security and the value perceived by consumers buying locally-produced food, even if it is priced higher than grocery stores.

The workgroup reviewed the August 17 memo prepared by Jim Goche. He said input is needed from stakeholders, especially producers.

Stephen Bramwell said the outline on the front has a multi-part approach, with two different economic models. The starting point would be data we already have, from USDA, WSDA, farmer's markets. A funding package would need to be developed to cover the costs of this work. Steps 1 – 4 of this proposal are part of the current work; steps 5 – 7 will need additional funding.

For today, the subcommittee would like feedback on the approach. Regarding a question about the purpose of this work, it addresses the statutory requirement to determine viability, and VSP also talks about establishing benchmarks. This would help both of those points.

Kelly McClain, WSDA, said the WSDA information is intended to be a tool kit. She wonders about including a SWOT analysis – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats. The Technical Panel will ultimately have to determine if the workplan is addressing agricultural viability, for example, whether the plan addresses the threat of conversion.

Stephen asked for specific feedback on the three prong approach addressed in the matrix on the first page: (2) metrics, (6) economic impact analysis, and (7) consequences. Charissa noted that much of the data being sought is readily available.

Comments on the land base indicators item 1:

- Is there a record of crop production and tonnage?
- Perhaps add a metric on amount of land harvested
- We want to articulate that this part will need further funding

Comments on water resources – item 2:

- Can also consider describing water resources by agricultural sectors
- Most important is a matrix of goods, benchmarks, tasks; want to tell the story better
- Those with water rights are in a good position but those without are not
- Issue of transfer of water rights that are not being used – need to provide better mechanism for that
 - It was noted that water rights can be protected by putting them in trust
- If a SWOT analysis is done, don't lose sight of the basic work we've done; keep simple statements
- Consider combining a and c, and b and d
- Would be good to have some method of tracking water use

Stephen said he's heard good ideas, including adding some specificity to the potential indicators.

Comments on regulatory risk management – item 3:

- Some of this falls under the ag liaison position being proposed
- It was noted the county is proposing clearing and grading ordinance changes, which affect ag (but those ordinances are not part of BSP if not adopted under the Critical Areas Ordinance/GMA framework); Charissa will check on this
- A and B could be combined, as they're both addressing ag viability
- Evan noted Spokane County is "marrying" VSP and RCCP into a Farm Smart program, with a "safe harbor" approach
- Item C might be too gently stated; need to actively promote regulatory reform

Comments on infrastructure – item 4:

- Does this contemplate any assessment of commercial agriculture infrastructure?
 - No metric proposed about hard infrastructure
- Some counties are addressing hard infrastructure through their transportation plans
- Need good ideas for hard infrastructure metrics

- Consider need for farm supply stores, large animal veterinarians
- Are there things in the community needed to maintain agricultural viability?

Comments on market – item 5:

- Addresses the profitability of farm operations
- Tricky category for metrics – some places are considering metrics like grant funding coming in, number of farmers’ markets
- Percentage of produce purchased locally?
- Value is added by selling local, without a middleman; what happens if society value changes and they don’t value local production enough to pay more for products?
- Need to reach out to people – get information on technical assistance
- Producers and regulatory agencies need to get together and discuss issues
- Marketing side is very important, showing how in Thurston County things get from farm to grocery stores
- Follow up on perception – the social values column gets at that: “this food is worth the extra dollars you’re paying for it”
- Another metric could be the number of locally labelled products
- Consider a “good steward” designation for VSP production; Charissa is continuing to look into this
 - She noted the stewardship plan on page 2 addresses this idea
- Stephen said some of the data gathering that WSU can do can answer some of the local questions

Jim asked how we can get WSU and other universities together to look at data? He wonders when we will know about putting together a funding package. Stephen suggested if the subcommittee identifies some data needed that’s not otherwise collected, that might be elements of a funding package.

The workgroup decided to continue discussion on the remainder of the agenda at the next meeting.

Next steps (Neil)

1. Neil will send out electronic version of ag viability subcommittee draft process; people comment back to Charissa or Maya by Monday, September 26.
2. Next meeting will be 3 hours; we will start reviewing the entire draft plan.

The meeting adjourned approximately 6:00 pm.

The next meeting will be on Thursday, October 20.