

# Community Vision Statement for Clallam County's Agricultural Sector

## January 2017

Farming is an essential part of Clallam County's history, culture, natural environment and economy. The county has a vibrant agricultural community with diverse assets, including high quality soils, a historically robust water supply, a wide range of working farms, and a mild climate suitable for year-round growing. These assets put the county in a strong position to seize opportunities presented by several emerging trends:

- Demand for locally produced food continues to rise at the national, regional and local level.
- The Puget Sound economy is strong, and this nearby market continues to grow rapidly.
- Changes in food distribution networks are favorable to small farms that can deliver high-demand products to local markets.
- Climate change is likely to improve the region's competitive position versus regions expected to see intensified long-term drought conditions.

To capitalize on these trends, the county's agricultural sector has several key challenges to overcome:

- Local agriculture exists in highly competitive markets, with increasing competition from large producers of organic foods, as well as other Pacific Northwest counties.
- Land-use pressures affect the availability of productive farmland; between 1950 and 2012, the county lost nearly 70% of its farmland. Low-density rural development has broken up many local farming tracts with residential development, and high land values threaten the economic viability of farming.
- The region's water supply faces increased stress from population growth and changing climate patterns.
- Clallam County's average farmer is 62 years of age; succession is therefore a critical issue in sustaining the local farming economy.
- High housing costs and a strong economy constrict the labor supply for local farms.

In addition, Clallam lags behind other Pacific Northwest counties in several respects. For example, other regions have more structured relationships within their agricultural communities and cohesive strategies for promoting farms and farm produce, and have used strategies to raise funds for these purposes from state and local sources. In addition, Clallam County has minimal resources allocated to agricultural development and infrastructure relative to regional competitors.

### **Vision Statement**

*The Clallam County Agricultural Commission envisions a future in which the county's agricultural sector is economically vibrant, the regional food supply is enriched by a wide range of locally-grown products, our rural character is maintained and enhanced by working farms, and farming is an integral part of local community life.*

The Commission-convened stakeholder group that conceived this vision also adopted a strategy for coordinated implementation. This strategy has three components:

### **Land**

The Commission will work with various community partners to preserve farmland across Clallam County.

Primary goals of this work are to:

- Permanently protect high-quality agricultural lands from development through the purchase of development rights and other conservation methods
- Build local capacity to facilitate mutually beneficial buyer-seller discussions around farmland transfer, and to educate estate planners and real estate brokers of options available to landowners
- Promote vibrant, self-sustaining farming community hubs to support retention, succession, and demand for land by potential future buyers

- Advocate for zoning changes that promote flexibility and growth of the supply of farmland
- Organize a community-wide coalition around farmland conservation projects and funding.

*The top priority to facilitate achievement of these goals is creation and funding of a countywide Conservation Futures program. This program, authorized by RCW 84.34, would be enacted by County Commissioners and funded by a small property tax levy. Similar programs have been employed for decades by 13 Washington counties for land preservation.* The Commission will seek partnership of various community organizations in land preservation activities, including North Olympic Land Trust, Clallam Conservation District, WSU Extension, Craft3, and the Clallam County Economic Development Council.

### **Water**

The Commission and partner organizations will collaborate to ensure adequate water supply for future farming in the county. Primary goals of this work are to:

- Promote drought-friendly farming practices, including irrigation efficiencies and crop selection
- Advocate for incentivizing new development in urban growth areas, and mitigation of new water uses
- Maintain water quality through proactive support of best runoff and pasture management practices
- Develop new storage reservoirs.

*The top priority to facilitate achievement of these goals is collaborative pursuit of a new Dungeness Reservoir.* The Commission will seek partnership of Clallam Conservation District, local irrigation districts, County and city governments in water supply support activities.

### **Business**

The Commission, local farmers and a range of partners will work cooperatively to support farm businesses, increase market access, and promote regional agricultural tourism opportunities. This work will take place at two levels – individual farms/farmers, and the local agricultural economy infrastructure. Primary goals for supporting individual farms and farmers are to:

- Provide education on best farming and business practices, and facilitate a mentoring program
- Ensure availability of financing for small business growth and creation
- Deliver assistance in attaining certification for accessing institutional markets.

Primary goals for developing economic infrastructure are to:

- Conduct a feasibility study of the viability of a local processing operation
- Facilitate a co-branding campaign for local produce
- Establish affordable farmworker housing alternatives
- Promote farm-to-institution markets

*The top priority to support farm business goals will be securing the inclusion of and support for agriculture as a key component of Clallam County's economic development strategies.* The Commission will seek partnership of various organizations for farm business support, including the Washington State University Extension program, the Economic Development Council, local chambers of commerce, Craft3, Washington State Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Coordinated pursuit of these strategies can benefit Clallam County's economy, landscape, farmers and community at-large for decades to come. The Agricultural Commission will cooperate with public, private and nonprofit sector partners to ensure that this vision serves as a framework for collective action.