

AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
OPERATING TRADITIONS
February, 1998

Committee purpose

The purpose for the Committee was established in the 1978 Citizen's Report: Agriculture in Thurston County. The purpose of the Committee is to advise the Thurston County Commissioners and Planning Commission on public decisions and/or emerging issues that would significantly affect agriculture. Additional functions are to review local, state, or federal programs identified by staff that could affect Thurston County agriculture; to conduct a regular review or evaluation of County efforts to protect and support agriculture; to consider and recommend new initiatives; and to work closely with Cooperative Extension and other groups to help them support agriculture.

Committee composition

The Committee is composed of eleven members serving two-year terms. Four members are to be non-farmer members to represent rural residents who may be affected by County efforts to protect farmland. Seven members are to be farmer-members representing a variety of the agriculture commodities produced in Thurston County and geographic areas of the County. Members may appoint alternates to serve during an absence.

The Committee may establish agriculture commodity contacts for industries not represented on the Committee. These contacts may be invited to meetings as needed to assist the Committee in understanding the needs and concerns of those industries when issues arise that would specifically affect those industries.

Ex-Officio members are appointed by the Board of Commissioners. Current ex-officio members are staff from the Cooperative Extension offices serving Thurston County, and the Thurston Conservation District. Ex-officio members participate as other appointed members in discussions and may designate alternates to serve during an absence.

Meeting schedule

Committee meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of the month or as needed. Meetings times are 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Special meetings may be called at the discretion of the Chair. Regular meetings may be canceled by the Chair.

Attendance

Absences may be excused only by the Chair. Committee members are encouraged to designate an alternate to attend in the place of the member. Attendance by an alternate does not count as an absence for the appointed member. A maximum of three unexcused absences are permitted per year. After the fourth unexcused absence the Committee will recommend that to the Board of Commissioners that the appointment be vacated.

A quorum is attendance by five or more of appointed members, not counting ex-officio members. A quorum is required for the Committee to make decisions or recommendations.

Election of officers

The Committee will elect a new Chair and Vice-Chair on an as-needed basis. Committee staff will serve as Secretary.

Duties of the Chair include the following:

- ❖ The Chair works with staff to set the agenda for each meeting.
- ❖ The Chair leads the meetings and facilitates discussions to ensure all agenda items are covered in a timely manner, and that all members are able to participate.
- ❖ The Chair ensures that the work of the Committee is consistent with the Committee's purpose statement and any specific direction provided by the Board of Commissioners.
- ❖ The Chair works with staff in drafting correspondence and signs correspondence on behalf of the Committee.
- ❖ The Chair determines which of members' absences are to be excused, and which are unexcused.
- ❖ The Chair works with staff in organizing the farm tours.
- ❖ The Chair may appoint subcommittees on an as-needed basis.

The duty of the Vice-Chair is to fulfill the role of the Chair when the Chair is unable to do so.

Duties of the Secretary include the following:

- ❖ The Secretary prepares meeting agendas and additional information as needed, which is mailed to Committee members one week in advance of each meeting.
- ❖ The Secretary arranges for meeting rooms and guest briefings.
- ❖ The Secretary takes notes at each meeting and prepares summary Meeting Notes.
- ❖ The Secretary works with the Chair to draft correspondence on behalf of the Committee.
- ❖ The Secretary works with the Commissioner's Office for the appointment and reappointment of Committee members.
- ❖ The Secretary maintains a Committee roster, mailing list, and a record of Committee actions and events.
- ❖ The Secretary works with the Chair to organize the farm tours.
- ❖ The Secretary solicits information from County departments about County programs and projects that may affect agriculture.
- ❖ The Secretary serves as liaison between the Committee and the Board of Commissioners as needed.

Meeting conduct

Meetings are run by the Chair, who reserves the right to limit the participation of any meeting attendees as needed to stay on schedule, to ensure discussions are balanced and focused, and that all members are able to participate.

Alternates filling in for appointed members may participate in the same capacity as the members they represent.

Industry contacts may participate at the discretion of the Chair, but their role is to educate Committee members, rather than participate in policy-recommendation decisions. In order to maintain the balance of interests on the Committee established by the Board of Commissioners, they may not participate in Committee decisions.

Ex-Officio members are professional staff who are valued for their expertise and their commitment to agriculture, and they may fully participate in discussions. In addition, ex-officio members are usually offered time to report on matters of interest to the Committee on each agenda. Advice to the Board of Commissioners is intended to represent the views of citizen Committee members, so ex-officio members may not participate in Committee decisions.

Decision-making

A quorum is attendance by five or more appointed members, not counting ex-officio members. A quorum is required for the Committee to make decisions or recommendations.

The Committee has a long tradition of cooperative decision-making. Most decisions are in the form of recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. These recommendations are usually made by a consensus of the members. Disagreements are usually resolved through a discussion process that involves respectful consideration of differing views, information-seeking, and openness to new ideas and creative solutions.

In the event of a disagreement that cannot be resolved, the Committee may issue majority and minority reports to the Board of Commissioners. It is the responsibility of the minority members to make their views known with a minority report. The Secretary may assist in the drafting of both recommendations.