



Frequently Asked Questions About Agritourism in Thurston County

In 2012, the Thurston County Resource Stewardship Department drafted an ordinance aimed at boosting agritourism in rural areas of the county. Subsequently, ordinance #14725, establishing an agritourism overlay district (AOD) in specific portions of Thurston County, was passed by the Board of County Commissioners. Below you will find answers to common questions about this effort.

What is agritourism?

Agritourism is increasing in popularity across the globe. The phrase “agritourism” generally refers to any activity that attracts visitors to a farm or ranch. Agritourists can choose from a wide variety of activities including picking pumpkins, riding horses, tasting honey, learning about wine and cheese making, and shopping at farm stands for locally hand-crafted goods. Agritourism gives farmers the opportunity to educate visitors about their way of life, share their agricultural heritage, and earn extra income.

What is the Agritourism Overlay District Ordinance?

In 2012, the Resource Stewardship Department drafted an ordinance that would create an “overlay” zoning district. Essentially, it is an umbrella zoning district that covers about 10 rural zoning districts. Drafts of the ordinance were brought before a working group that included representation from farmers, wineries, the Economic Development Council, the Visitor and Convention Bureau, the Port of Olympia, local farmers’ markets, and others. After the group had an opportunity to review the drafts, an ordinance was brought before the Planning Commission, who held a public hearing. The Planning Commission then made a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners, who scheduled another public hearing, then adopted the ordinance on March 13th, 2012.

Before the adoption of the AOD ordinance, Thurston County’s code did not address agritourism. By changing the code, Thurston County planted the seeds for rural land owners who are far from the urban centers to earn additional income, and for tourists to witness the importance of agricultural lands to our economy and way of life.

I've heard that Thurston County is trying to promote agriculture-related tourism by regulating a limit on customers. Is this true?

No, this is not true. The Resource Stewardship Department researched ordinances from across the nation to learn what works elsewhere and drafted an ordinance that fits Thurston County.

What happens next?

When the AOD ordinance was adopted, the Board of County Commissioners included an 18-24 month trial period in it. This means that 18-24 months from the date it was passed, the Commissioners will begin working with the Resource Stewardship department and the public to determine if changes need to be made to the ordinance. This process is currently slated to begin at the end of 2013.

Who should I call if I have questions?

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