

THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

McLane Building Conference Room
5033 Harrison Ave NW, Olympia, WA 98502

Minutes for May 26, 2016

Members Present: EJ Zita (Chair), Robert McIntosh (Vice-Chair), Mary DiMatteo, Pat Labine, Eric Johnson, Chris Groen, and Richard Mankamyer.

Staff Present: Dave Nygard, Charissa Waters, and Stephen Bramwell

Members Excused: Kevin Jensen and Bryan Fisher

Guest Speaker: Charissa Waters, Thurston County

Public Present: Brent Butler, Thurston County

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 by EJ Zita followed by round-table introductions of the members, staff and the public attending the evening's meeting.

News sharing – Vacancies are no longer being posted on the County website, which could explain why we haven't been getting applications. Could use more public outreach.

Brent Butler introduced himself as the new Resource Stewardship Director and briefly explained his background and role in the Department.

Cliff Moore has resigned from the County Manager position.

WA just passed the industrial hemp bill to allow for commercial growing and marketing, although there are no rules and regulations yet. Joy Becker will be available in the future for workshops to help farmers start hemp growing operations.

WA State did not make the top ten in the 2016 Locavore Index (ranked 16).

Approval of previous meeting minutes -The minutes from the April 28th meeting were reviewed, corrected and approved by consensus with amendments.

Approval of agenda – The agenda was discussed, and it was approved as is.

Presentation Overview – **Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)**. The VSP is an alternative incentive based approach to maintain and improve the long term viability of Ag and protect and voluntarily enhance critical areas within the vicinity of Ag activities, while also reducing farmland conversion in Thurston County. The protection and enhancement of the 5 critical areas (wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, important wildlife habitat

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conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, and geologically hazardous areas) must be balanced with the dual goal of maintaining and improving Ag viability. There has been a history of conflict and litigation between environmental and agricultural interest groups, which in 2007 led to WA State Legislature appointing the Ruckleshaus Center to facilitate stakeholder agreement on a solution to address this issue. In 2011, the VSP was created out of this process and adopted under GMA law by the State legislature to provide an alternative approach. Funding was provided to two pilot Counties, Thurston and Chelan. Under the VSP, counties can opt-in to participate rather than continue under the traditional CAO regulations in GMA. 27 of 39 counties in WA State opted-in.

Thurston County opted-in and received funding to begin development of the work plan in 2012. The VSP workgroup is a partnership between many stakeholders - farmers, tribes, farm bureau, etc. All of the watersheds in TC have been selected as priority and will be included in the VSP work plan. The work plan approval process includes submitting it to the WA Conservation Commission and a State Technical Panel for review. The goal is to submit the plan by the end of 2016. The Committee had several questions regarding the benchmarks and metrics and how to measure success. Stephen mentioned that the metrics need to be things that the farmers have control over (e.g. miles of new exclusion fences installed). The Stewardship Plans that will be developed with the technical assistance provider (TCD) and the farmer allow for negotiation and site-specific flexibility of conservation practices to be implemented. TCD will monitor sites and benchmarks and report on the watershed level. They keep each farm info confidential. TCD will need more staff, and funding for implementation is not yet secured.

South Puget Sound Farms to Market Assessment discussion. This study assessed local Ag: limiting factors, needs and gaps, such as infrastructure. The big ones identified in this study were land and labor, as well as storage and processing infrastructure. This study found that many farmers did not want to take out loans to solve infrastructure issues.

Robert pointed out that an inexpensive solution that was identified in this study was cooperation among farmers to access markets, such as an online market place. Buyers showed interest in being able to purchase from local farmers through a centralized system. A distribution center or food hub could serve this need, though its cost would be high. Another recommendation from the study was to make better use of available resources and infrastructure, while also building new infrastructure to fill gaps, when necessary. 62% of farmers who responded to the study said they need cold storage.

Dave mentioned a DNR tree farm that has cold storage that they use in the winter for bare-root stock, but is empty in the summer. They shut it off in the summer, but there are renewable energy options to power a building that size, and there are incentives for renewable power. Zita mentioned that they are looking at the Alpaca ranch property for a

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number of different functions that need large buildings, although they don't have cold storage. Eric mentioned a cold storage building on Moon Rd that is available.

Stephen gave an update on the tour to Helsing Junction. One of the issues that came out of the last Food Systems Council was competing against the price of wholesale food. They discussed developing some kind of direct-buy campaign (buy local is being used by large businesses now that may lack integrity). They came to the conclusion that those interested in direct sales of produce are a small percentage of total buyers. One of the questions they were brainstorming was—what are the initiatives that are being undertaken elsewhere to increase interest for direct sales? Can large institutions and businesses be targeted? Helsing Junction is a model for outreach and marketing strategies.

Funding for the Farm to School program was recently requested and approved in order to increase direct sales of produce to schools. Mary reported that the Olympia Farmers Market just lost one of their farmers to direct sale and wholesale because it wasn't worth the time and resources for them to get to Market.

Green Sheet – One green sheet was discussed for Marijuana and they are not increasing impervious surfaces or square footage. The Committee had no comments.

Public Comment – Brent mentioned that the State has authorized the update of the Comprehensive Plan; for Olympia and Lacey this process took 3-4 years. The County is just starting the process and will come back to the Committee to discuss the chapters of the plan and request input in specific areas. This effort is led by the Long-Range Planning Division, and TRPC will be helping with certain aspects. Strategies and goals come from the community and the Committee will have opportunity to be a part of those conversations and provide direction and recommendations.

Other business – The Committee members introduced themselves around the table to Brent.

Motion to adjourn - Adopted at 9:05pm.

Respectfully submitted by *Charissa Waters*