

Acres in Farmland and Number and Average Size of Farms

OUTCOME: MAINTAIN THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF NATURAL RESOURCE LANDS

Countywide Planning Policy Rationale

"A fundamental component of the Countywide planning strategy is the maintenance of the traditional character of the Rural Area with its mix of forests, farms, high-quality natural environment....Commercial and non-commercial farming...shall be encouraged to continue and to expand as possible." (*CPP FW-9. See also LU 22 - 23*)

Located predominantly in the Rural Area, Agricultural Production Districts (APD) are largely contiguous blocks of designated farmland as set forth in the King County Comprehensive Plan. APDs support agriculture in King County through the protection of agricultural soils and related services and activities. There are 42,000 acres designated as farmland in the APDs of King County. This acreage has remained constant at about 3% of the county for the last 25 years.

In addition to designating Agricultural Production Districts, King County supports agriculture through the Farmland Preservation Program (FPP). Established in 1979 through voter initiative, King County is authorized to purchase development rights of agricultural land (both within and outside designated APDs). By voluntarily selling development rights, property owners agree to restrict their property's land use to agriculture or open space and limit housing density, which permanently preserves farmland in King County. As of 2006, about 13,200 acres of farmland were permanently protected through the Farmland Preservation Program.

King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks estimates that approximately 48,000 acres of land are actively farmed in King County. This includes 23,000 acres within APDs and an additional 25,000 acres throughout the Rural Area.

According to the 2002 U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture, an estimated 1,500 farms are worked in King County, a decrease from the estimated 1,817 King County farms in 1997. Due to changes in census methodology to account for coverage gaps, farm data reported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture prior to 1997 are not comparable to these counts and are not included in this analysis.

Averaging 27 acres, King County's farms are markedly smaller than the average farm in Washington State at 428 acres. Large farms were split into smaller acreages. The smaller farms tend to be higher value direct-market operations, such as growing row crops or raising livestock. These are able to be successful on fewer acres.

Figure 40.1

