

Topic/Title: A Farmland Inventory and Protection Strategy for Bainbridge Island

Organization: Friends of the Farms

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Personnel from organization to be involved: Christy Carr, Bart Berg (Please note, main contact for the organization is based in Seattle during regular business hours so travel to Bainbridge Island is not required for in-person meetings. Site visits may be desirable for initial ground-truthing and/or data verification.

Data available: All necessary base data is available from various sources including the City of Bainbridge Island and Kitsap Conservation District. Both agencies have indicated their willingness to facilitate data sharing.

Project Description:

Working with a non-profit group, the students will create an inventory of existing and potential future farmland properties to be used to develop a long-term farmland protection strategy for Bainbridge Island, Washington. The project will produce a queryable database of farmland properties ranked for their protection priority and feasibility.

Bainbridge Island offers one of the most sensible places to protect farmland: it has at once a rich, multi-cultural agricultural heritage dating back nearly a century and a dedicated cadre of food and farm enthusiasts poised to shepherd farming into the next. The island has a rural feel but access to a robust urban marketplace. Appreciation for local food has skyrocketed with residents beginning to make the connection with local farmland.

That being said, access to land is the most-often stated constraint for new and experienced farmers – and even with many of the social and natural systems in place that favor local farmland – the island is losing it. Bainbridge Island is not far off the farm loss trends of Kitsap County or Puget Sound and has been losing over 180 acres of undeveloped/unprotected land every year for the last 15 years.

An admiral chunk of farmland exists today due to the island's agricultural history and past preservation efforts. There is more work to be done and a more strategic and focused approach is needed to do it.

A specific goal of Friends of the Farms is to increase the acreage of permanently protected farmland on Bainbridge Island. In order to do this, we need to know what we have now and what may be available for farming in the future.

A comprehensive farmland inventory does not exist for the island. The project will result in an inventory (database) of agricultural land that can be used to develop a strategy for farmland

protection. The GIS work will provide an inventory of farmland properties including a database of land characteristics such as soil, aspect, water availability, proximity to schools/downtown/other farms, and land value. An initial prioritization of properties will be conducted using the GIS database and spatial analysis capabilities. The GIS work will also provide visual tools (maps) of existing and potential future farmland properties that will be very useful to the organization in education and outreach efforts related to farmland protection.

Expected benefits to organization: The organization will gain an inventory of farmland that does not currently exist and will be extremely valuable in farmland protection efforts. The maps and data generated from the project will be used in grant funding applications. The information will assist the organization in its prioritization efforts for farmland protection and, as importantly, provide essential foundational information.

Expected benefits to students: The students will have the opportunity to work with a small non-profit organization on a largely independent basis. They will also have the opportunity to work with project partners including a local land trust and conservation district. They will also be able to assist in determining land characteristics to include in the database, including the question of “what is agriculture?” The work may also serve as a template for other small organizations that also have a need for farmland inventories.