

A photograph of a shepherd herding a large flock of sheep across a paved road. The sheep are white and woolly, with some having blue or green markings on their backs. The shepherd, wearing a dark jacket and blue jeans, is walking away from the camera on the right side of the road, holding a red stick. The road has double yellow lines. In the background, there are green trees and a cloudy sky. A red textured vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

Growing Our Future

An Agricultural Strategic Action Plan
for San Juan County, WA

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Front cover:
Moving the Sheep, Lopez Island
Photo: Scott Hatch

Back cover photo: Stephen Schlott

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Island apples:
ripe and ready for harvest.
Photo: Kurt Thorsen,
San Juan County Land Bank

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A new crop of farmers.
Photo: San Juan County Land Bank

San Juan County

is renowned for its deeply rooted, island-based farm culture, as shown by the abundance of diverse and exceptional farm products, the pastoral beauty of fertile farmland, and our commitment to sustaining and growing a resilient and vibrant local food system.

“Shake the hand that
feeds you.”
~ Michael Pollan



Why is Farmland Preservation Important for San Juan County?

San Juan County is made up of islands isolated in the Salish Sea. Without farmland and farms, we lose our capacity to grow food locally. Having farms and an active farm community supports food security, provides healthy foods for our community, creates jobs, sustains our rural heritage, and enhances our quality of life. Our pastoral landscape, which has been defined by historic farm practices, is alluring to tourists and locals alike. A thriving farm economy strengthens and diversifies our local economic base. Farmers are good stewards of the land, contributing to the environmental health of our landscape, while also keeping cost of services lower. No farms, no farmers, no food.



Grain harvest,
San Juan Island.

Executive Summary

The San Juan County Agricultural Strategic Action Plan identifies key goals and strategies that will result in the preservation of priority farmland and strategic actions to strengthen agriculture in San Juan County. Extensive outreach to stakeholders throughout the county provided essential input in the identification of priority issues and goals. Mapping analysis was conducted to identify priority farmland for preservation.



San Juan Island
Farmers' Market.
Photo: Eliza Buck

This plan has been developed collaboratively by the San Juan County Agricultural Resources Committee, the San Juan County Land Bank, and the San Juan Preservation Trust. Funding for the plan was awarded through a grant from the Washington State Office of Farmland Preservation.

The following key findings and recommended actions from the strategic planning process reveal the complexity of the task that lies ahead.

- ❖ San Juan County has ample farmland for farming, including land historically farmed that is now marginally used for hay and grazing. Providing access to farmable land owned by non-farmers is essential to maintaining and expanding the agricultural economy.
- ❖ The continued use of farmland for hay production without adding soil amendments through sustainable livestock grazing or other organic inputs has led to a serious and prevalent depletion of soil fertility. Farming practices that include sustainable management of the soil are necessary to restore productive and fertile farms.
- ❖ The islands are primarily rocks in the sea, and most of the rainfall runs directly into the surrounding waters of Puget Sound. Limited aquifers and saltwater intrusion on the shorelines make most farming dependent on catchment ponds for irrigation and livestock watering.

The mandates of the San Juan County Land Bank and the San Juan Preservation Trust include protection of farmland, and approximately 5,000 acres have already been conserved. Continued commitment by these organizations to the conservation of active farmland will be strengthened by collaborative approaches to farmland management, programs to link farmers to conserved land, and funding to support these efforts.

- ❖ The average age of farmers in San Juan County is 61.8 years, higher than in other parts of the state. The majority of farmers in the county today have no plan for transferring their farm operation to the next generation, and for many, the value of their farmland as real estate is one of their greatest assets and a necessary part of their retirement plan. Appropriate state or local policies and regulations, as well as training, support, and resources are necessary to promote effective transfer, succession, and leasing of farmland for a new generation of farmers. Housing for these new farmers is a major issue as there are no code allowances for adding housing for succession farmers on existing farms, nor is there affordable housing available for new farming efforts on leased land.
- ❖ The average size of farms in San Juan County is now 20 acres, compared to 228 acres in 1964, reflecting the shift away from large farms with livestock operations to small, diversified farms growing market crops and some livestock for local consumption.

tion. Conservation efforts should focus on “farmsheds”—areas with clusters of active small farms—as well as larger historic farms, thereby helping to preserve and maintain critical farm-related infrastructure and networking among farmers.

- ❖ The geographic isolation of San Juan County and the resulting high cost of infrastructure, inputs, and transportation act to limit the creation of infrastructure necessary for storage, value-added processing, and expansion of local agricultural production, businesses, and markets. Innovative, transportable and flexible cooperative approaches are needed to serve the needs of producers on each island. This isolation, however, also presents an opportunity. Islanders naturally place a high value on food security and may benefit from their isolation to preserve genetic diversity, for example, by establishing an organic seed industry. There is increasing concern and opposition to genetically modified organisms with islanders seeing their natural boundaries as extra protection for organic honey and seed production.
- ❖ Public and private land conservation organizations seek to provide public benefits through access, views, and habitat and historical preservation. These organizations could further benefit the community by encouraging opportunities such as educational programs on the farm, food production for food bank or local schools, new farmer training, affordable access for new farmers, or research by public agencies such as WSU Research Station.



Blue Moon Produce,
Waldron Island
Photo: Rebecca Moore

Following the countywide outreach meetings that established the above issues, stakeholders then identified the top five recommendations, which are presented in this plan. A list of the other priorities is included in Appendix 2.

The top recommendations are:

- ❖ Preserve farmland for farming;
- ❖ Adopt and promote scale-appropriate state and local regulations in order to foster farm businesses and support a thriving local farm economy;
- ❖ Promote opportunities for new farmers to establish successful farms;
- ❖ Develop adequate access to infrastructure necessary to process and maintain diverse agricultural operations;
- ❖ Expand local and regional marketing opportunities.

In order to achieve these recommendations, the first priority is to increase organizational capacity to support farming, conservation of farmland, and expansion of the agricultural economy. Successful implementation of strategic actions would involve a formalized collaborative approach bringing together committed organizations with expertise in key elements in strengthening agriculture in San Juan County.

As a result of this strategic planning process, it is clear that success in protecting farmland will ultimately be defined not only by the amount of farmland conserved, but also by the productive, profitable, and sustainable use of that farmland by local farmers, thereby contributing to a strong, diversified economy that benefits farmers and their community, while also building a viable and resilient local food system.

“We bought the farm. We built the soil.”
~ Peter Corning, Synergy Farm,
San Juan Island

Summary of Recommended Actions

Issue	Actions	Timeframe
Farmland	Update database to identify & map priority farmland for conservation	Annually
	Research & promote public/private collaborative strategies for conservation	1-2 yrs
	Support renewal of Land Bank charter	1 yr
	Promote incentives for farmland conservation tax programs	2-5 yrs
	Educate elected officials about benefits of protecting farmland	Ongoing
	Research feasibility of Transfer of Development Rights	5-10 yrs
Regulations	Promote and adopt scale-appropriate regulations and regulatory reform	Annually
	Promote initiatives and resolutions that support sustainable agriculture	Annually
	Promote statewide adoption of Small Farm Intern Pilot Program	1-2 yrs
Farmers	Develop and promote programs for new farmers	2-5 yrs
	Establish website and database to connect farmers with farmland	1-2 yrs
	Establish model lease documents	1-2 yrs
	Establish collaborative programs that facilitate training for new farmers on conserved farmland	1-2 yrs
	Research and propose innovative solutions to provide affordable farm housing for new farmers and workers	5-10 yrs
Infrastructure	Develop website and database to connect farmers to land with infrastructure	1-2 yrs
	Create cooperative approach for transportation of products and materials	2-5 yrs
	Research feasibility and funding opportunities for development of local processing facilities	2-5 yrs
	Promote creation of composting facility on each ferry-served island	2-5 yrs
	Research and promote collaborative approaches for funding to invest in infrastructure of conserved farmland	2-5 yrs
	Explore tax incentives or other programs to develop infrastructure	5-10 yrs
Marketing	Expand Island Grown program to promote and strengthen markets	1-2 yrs
	Promote opportunities for direct sales of local products	1-2 yrs
	Increase awareness through tasting events, community dinners, farm to chef	1-2 yrs
	Promote agritourism to educate consumers and to increase revenue for farmers	1-2 yrs
	Expand local produce section in island markets	2-5 yrs
	Develop and strengthen regional markets	2-5 yrs
Most importantly: Organizational Collaboration		
	Research and propose optimal organizational structure for collaborative systems approach to strengthen and advance agriculture for San Juan County	1 yr
	Conduct feasibility evaluation of proposed collaborative	1 yr
	Seek funding to support initial start-up of collaborative	1 yr
	Identify pilot project(s) for early implementation	1 yr
	Formalize organizational structure and funding to support ongoing implementation	1 yr
	Coordinate funding requests to maximize benefit for achieving mutual goals	1 yr



Section 1:
Profile of Farming in San Juan County, Washington

The San Juan Islands, situated in the northwest corner of Washington State in northern Puget Sound, have long been known for their beauty. There are over 418 islands in the San Juan Archipelago at high tide, supporting diverse ecosystems and landscapes: rocky shorelines, prairie habitat, pastoral farms and pasture, tidelands, lush native forests, freshwater lakes and ponds, moss covered rocky balds, all combine to create a stunning landscape.



San Juan Valley,
San Juan Island
Photo: San Juan County
Land Bank

The San Juan Islands have over 407 miles of marine shoreline and approximately 175 square miles (111,941 acres) of land surface. The three largest islands (comprising about 80 percent of the overall land mass) are **Orcas Island** (57 square miles, or 36,432 acres), **San Juan Island** (55 square miles, or 35,448 acres), and **Lopez Island** (29 square miles, or 18,847 acres). **Shaw, Blakely, Waldron, Decatur, Stuart, and Henry** islands (in order of size) are each 1,000 acres or more.

Washington State Ferries provides regular transportation to and from the four largest islands: Lopez, Orcas, San Juan, and Shaw. There is also regular seaplane service to and from Seattle and Bellingham. Either way, transportation to and from the islands is increasingly expensive. For example, a roundtrip ferry trip for car and driver between Anacortes and Friday Harbor costs about \$40 for a car. These costs add great expense to the cost of farming, increasing the cost of fuel, fencing, and soil amendments, as well as adding to the cost of shipping products off-island to regional markets. Additionally, the ferries add uncertainty about getting on- or off-island, due to overloads, especially in the tourist season, further adding to challenges of transporting livestock or fresh perishable produce.

In the last decade, the primary economic drivers in San Juan County have been tourism, construction, and real estate. Based on

the 2007 Census, agriculture contributes a bit over 3% of the total county revenue. With the economic crash of 2008, construction and real estate have declined dramatically, as has tourism, sending a ripple of economic decline throughout the county. Efforts to build and restore a stronger economy would

benefit from increased diversification, including expansion of the agricultural industry.

History of Farming in San Juan County

Historically, farmland has been a vital component of the San Juan Islands’ landscape. After the settlement of a boundary dispute between the United States and Great Britain in 1872, the islands were surveyed and opened up to homesteading. The majority of the land claimants were farmers. The number of farmers tripled from 84 in 1880 to 278 ten years later, while total farm acreage rose from 17,572 to 41,761 acres during the same period. From 1900 through 1930, agriculture boomed in the islands: both the number of farmers and total acreage of farmland grew each decade to reach a high of 566 farmers in 1925 and 68,513 acres in 1920. The Depression and World War II put a damper on local agriculture, so that by 1954, agricultural labor constituted only 25% of the county work force.

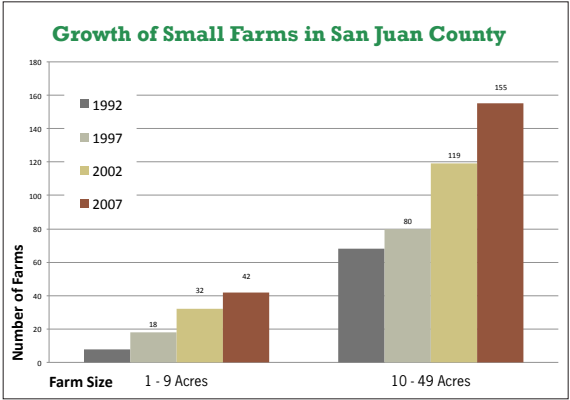
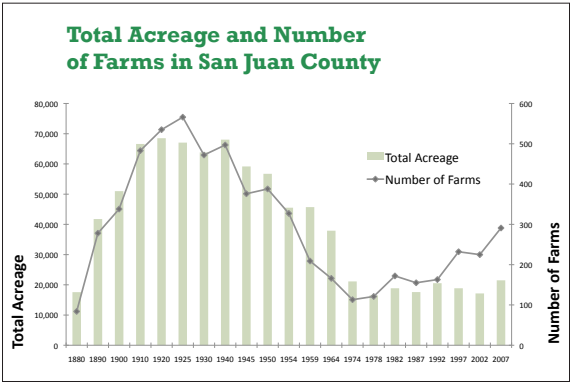
In the early settlement period, the principal means of farming was subsistence-based, supplying a homestead economy. Farm families had small kitchen gardens; raised several acres of potatoes, root

crops, and legumes; had several dozen fruit trees; and owned a milch cow, oxen for plowing, sheep, and pigs. In the 1890s, farms grew in size, and farmers specialized in livestock raising or grain crops. The fruit industry also came to the islands at this time, first with Italian plum-prunes and later with apples, pears, peaches, and cherries. The early twentieth century saw the development of ‘scientific’ farming, with the introduction of livestock such as Guernsey and Jersey dairy cattle and improved breeds of sheep. Peas were grown on a large scale in San Juan Valley and also on Lopez and Orcas, and strawberries became an important crop on San Juan and Orcas. After World War II, agriculture in the islands changed once again, with the introduction of new technology such as gasoline tractors and beef cattle gradually replacing dairy herds.

Farming in San Juan County Today

Within the last few decades, agriculture in San Juan County has been on the rebound. San Juan County farmers specialize in crops such as grass-fed meats, berries, tree fruits, and year-round produc- tion of vegetables for market, as well as fiber, lavender, and herbs. They create value-added products such as jams, jellies, and sauces. More recently, higher value products include artisan cheeses and an apple distillery for production of Calvados. Increased construction of greenhouses and hoop houses have allowed year-round produc- tion of crops that would typically die in the cold winter weather, and also help production of heat-loving crops such as tomatoes, melons, and some herbs.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) census, between the years 2002 and 2007 farms in San Juan



County grew 29% in number (225 to 291) and 25% in total acreage (17,146 to 21,472), while the average size decreased slightly. Most of this growth was in small farms: farms of 1-9 acres increased from 32 in number in 2002 to 42 in 2007, and farms of 10-49 acres increased from 119 in 2002 to 155 in 2007. Today, the average size of commercial farms in San Juan County is about 20 acres, representing a shift to more intense production of market crops, and a shift away from the larger livestock operations that were prevalent in the 1900s.

In 2007, the total market value of agricultural sales in San Juan County was \$3,617,000 (up from \$3,114,000 in 2002), of which \$1,688,000, or 43%, was in crop sales and \$1,929,000, or 53%, was in livestock. The average per farm was \$12,431, a drop from \$13,838 in 2002. In 2007, 73% of farms had annual sales of under \$10,000 and 6% had sales of \$50,000 or more. In 2002, 68% of San Juan County’s farms had annual sales of less than \$10,000, and only 3% of farms had sales of \$50,000 or more.

Direct marketing sales (sales of agricultural products by the farmer directly to the consumer) were first recorded in 1997. San Juan County’s direct marketing sales grew from \$174,000 in 1997 to \$418,000 in 2002—an increase of 140%—and again 77% to \$739,000 in 2007, an overall increase of 325%. Certified organic sales were first recorded in 2002. San Juan County’s certified organic sales increased 150% from \$115,000 in 2002 to \$288,000 in 2007.

The following offers some examples that represent the diversity and innovation of San Juan County agriculture today:

Island Grown Farmers Cooperative. In 1996, San Juan County farmers, WSU San Juan County Extension, the Lopez Community Land Trust, and local retailers collaborated to create the first USDA-inspected mobile meat processing unit in the nation. The Island Grown Farmers Cooperative (IGFC) was formed to manage the mobile unit for local farmers. The mobile slaughter unit allows the farmers to slaughter their livestock directly on the farm, reducing stress and the cost of transporting the animals to be slaughtered off-island. Through this cooperative effort and direct marketing, livestock farmers in San Juan County can now serve more local customers and increase their profits by utilizing the USDA-inspected Mobile Processing Unit. Locally-raised meats are now available at local farmstands, grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and restaurants. The innovation and success of the mobile slaughter unit gained national and international attention, and is being replicated in rural farm communities throughout the world. In 2010, membership in IGFC was about 64, half of whom (32) were from San Juan County. The cooperative also processes livestock from non-member farms. That year, an estimated 100,000 lbs, or about \$400,000 in value, of USDA-inspected meat were processed by IGFC in San Juan County, of which approxi- mately 50% was beef, and 50% was lamb and pork. The mobile processing unit is one of only two certified organic meat proces- sors west of the Cascades.



The family milk cow
Photo: San Juan County Land Bank

Local Markets. Most farms sell their products directly to consum- ers through farm stands and farmers’ markets, as well as to local retail grocery stores, food co-ops, and restaurants. Increasingly, local producers deliver their meat or shellfish directly to high-end restaurants in the Seattle area. Today, there are farmers’ markets in Friday Harbor (San Juan Island), Eastsound (Orcas Island), and Lopez Village (Lopez Island). In 1992, the first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) was established in the county; today there are at least five throughout the county. The San Juan Islands Agriculture Guild, established in 2008, worked closely with mem- bers of the community to purchase the historic Brickworks Build- ing on Nichols Street for the purpose of establishing a year-round space for a farmers’ market in Friday Harbor. The space will also be available for other public events. Many studies have articulated the extensive community and economic benefits derived from establishment of a year-round permanent farmers market.

Wineries. There are currently two wineries in the county: Lopez Island Vineyards (est. 1987) and San Juan Vineyards (est. 1996), both of which grow white grape varieties such as Madeleine Angevine and Siegerrebe for their white wines and import red grapes from the Yakima and Columbia valleys for their red wines. Westcott Bay Cider, established in 1999 on San Juan Island, has been producing a high quality crisp hard cider from old world varieties of cider apples planted on the land. Westcott Bay Cider is sold in local and regional markets. San Juan Distillery has recently opened in conjunction with Westcott Bay Cider, and is distilling its cider into eau de vie and apple brandy, as well as gin.

Dairies. There are currently three licensed dairies in the islands: Our Lady of the Rock (cow milk) on Shaw Island, and Heritage Farm (cow milk) and Quail Croft (goat milk) on San Juan Island. Quail Croft milk is primarily used to make artisan goat cheeses for

sale at the farmers market and at local groceries. Increasingly, as in the days of old, many small family farms have their own cows or goats that produce milk for home consumption and cheese making.

Aquaculture. Shallow bays fed by the cold, clean waters of San Juan County offer excellent habitat for shellfish grown on aquacul- ture farms. In the shallow mudflats of Shoal Bay on the north end of Lopez, Jones Family Farms grows mussels and several species of oysters and clams, for sales to high-end restaurants in the islands, Seattle, and beyond. Oysters are also grown by Judd Cove Shellfish and Buck Bay Shellfish Farm on Orcas. Established in the 1970s, Westcott Bay Sea Farms also produces several species of oysters, clams, and mussels at its 23-acre site in Westcott Bay on San Juan Island.

Farm-to-School Programs. San Juan County has farm-to-school programs established on San Juan Island, Orcas Island, and Lopez Island. Since the islands have separate school districts, each program is unique, with different funding sources, curriculum focus, and connections to local food.

❖ **Food For Thought:** In 2008, the San Juan Island School District decided to transition from a traditional food service program to one based on fresh food supplied by local and regional producers and prepared daily on site. The Experience Food Project initiated the transition, and the school program is now called Food For Thought. In addition to providing freshly-prepared lunches for elementary, middle and high school students, culinary courses are offered, with credit provided through the vocational training program in the high school.

❖ **Lopez Island Farm Education:** The Lopez Island Farm Education (LIFE) farm-to-school program was founded in 2001 when a local organic demonstration farm—S&S Homestead Farm— offered to grow greens for the school lunch program. It is funded by the Lopez Island School District and local donations. Infrastruc- ture, including construction of three large hoop houses for food production for the school lunch program, was donated by the family foundation. The program supports an organic garden and orchard on campus, which includes several hoop houses that provide veg- etables throughout the year. The program is also used for teaching purposes, with children growing some of the vegetables, weighing the harvest, and cooking and preserving the produce.

❖ **The Orcas Island Farm to Cafeteria Program:** The Orcas Island Farm to Cafeteria program was established in 2004 through the efforts of a local high school student and her family. Fresh vegeta- bles are obtained from local and regional farms. The program is supported in part through the Orcas Island Education Foundation as well as other donors. With a student population of around 500, the program serves about 190 breakfasts and 300 lunches daily.

❖ **Farm Education and Sustainability for Teens:** FEAST is a summer program for Orcas Island Public High School students, who can earn credit by working on local farms and in the Orcas Island Farm to Cafeteria Program.

Island Profiles of Farming

Distinctive agricultural traditions have developed on the separate islands due to varying geography, topography, soils and microclimates. The following presents brief profiles of farming on the major islands.

San Juan Island

The second largest island in the San Juan archipelago with 55.3 square miles or 35,448 acres, San Juan has a varied topography, ranging in elevation from sea level to Mount Dallas (1086 feet).

There are several valleys that have good soils for farming, with San Juan Valley being the largest and Beverton and West valleys also having significant acreage. Several of these valley areas, as well as other areas on the island, were ringed by Garry oak savannah-like prairies, which were burned over seasonally by the Salish Indians in order to allow for the growth of camas and other edible lilies as well as browse for deer. These prairies provided excellent native pasture for cattle, goats, horses, and sheep, while swine rooted for lily bulbs and ate the oak mast. After several attempts at locating a main port, Friday Harbor (population 2,130 in 2008) was established in 1873 as the county seat and is the only incorporated municipality in the San Juan County. Several other villages had a dense enough population to merit post offices, with the largest surviving one being Roche Harbor on the north end of the island. The Washington State Ferry terminal is located in Friday Harbor, which also has an airport.

Past. San Juan was the earliest farmed island, with the Hudson’s Bay Company arriving in 1853 to establish Belle Vue Sheep Farm at the south end of the island. In addition to sheep, they also raised cattle, hogs, and various grain and root crops such as oats, wheat, potatoes and turnips. With the settlement of the boundary dispute in 1872, American settlers who had already squatted on land applied for preemption or homestead grants, and began subsistence farming. During the 1880s and 1890s, larger scale farming was practiced, with dairy cattle, fruit, and grain production. During the 1920s, peas were raised for canning, and a pea cannery was established, along with a creamery, in Friday Harbor. The island saw large-scale poultry production, primarily chickens and turkeys, with John McMillin’s Bellevue Farm producing thousands of chickens, geese, and turkeys. After World War II, agriculture gradually declined, with both the cannery and the creamery in Friday Harbor closing in the 1960s.

Case Study: Red Mill Farm, San Juan Island
Protected by San Juan Preservation Trust, 1990

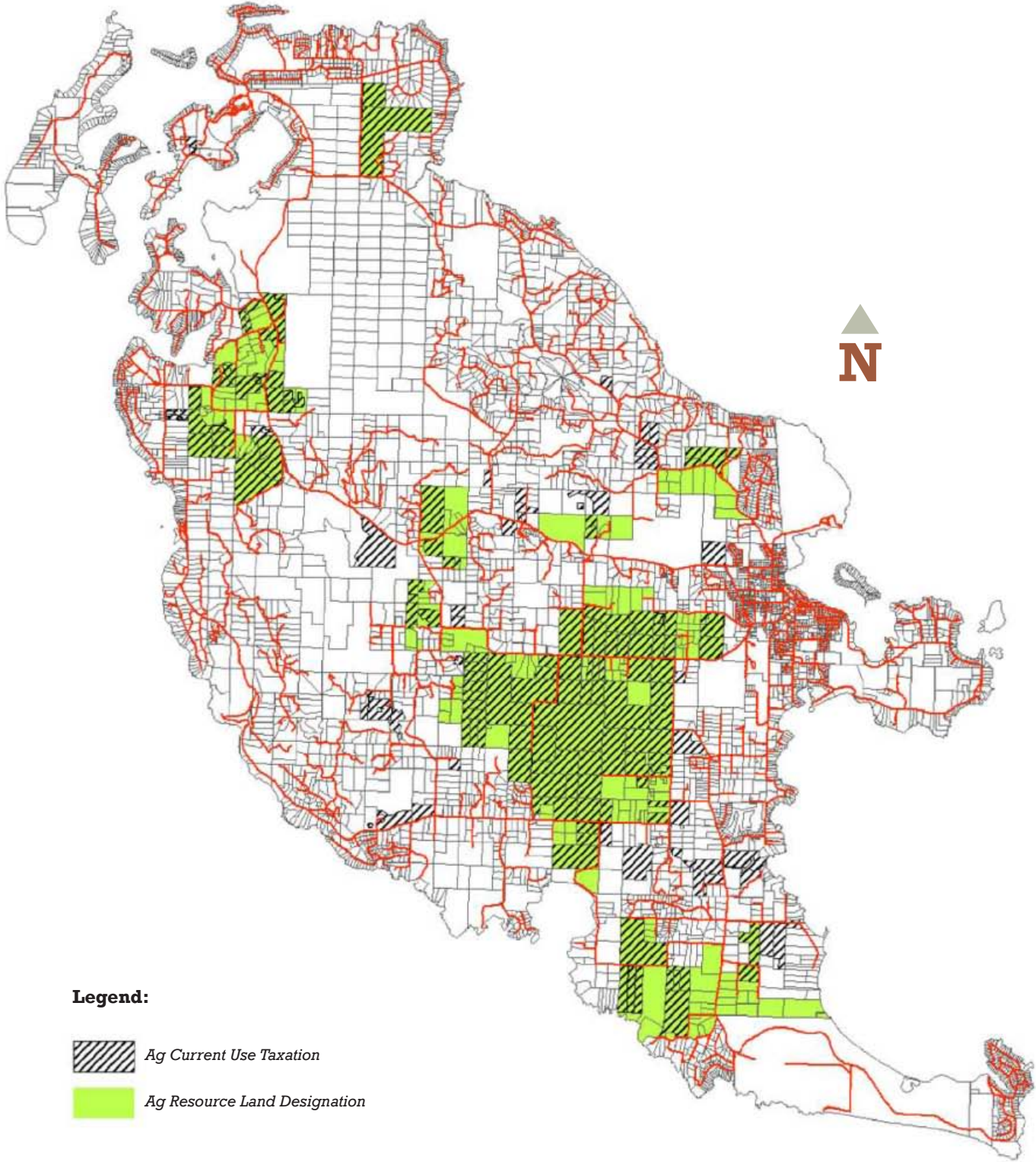


Photo: Jane Fox, San Juan County Land Bank

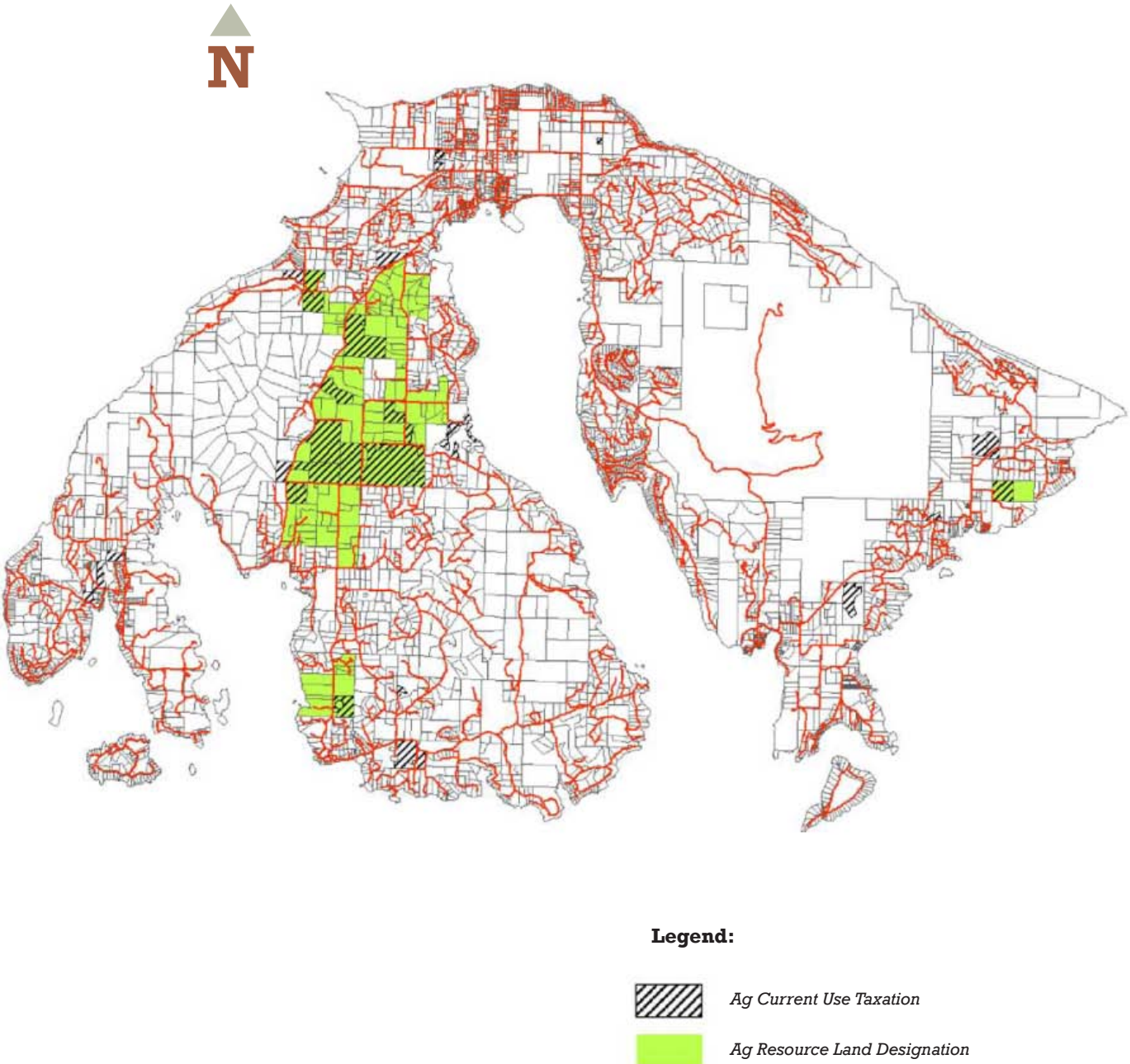
Red Mill Farm, located in the agricultural heart of San Juan Valley, is comprised of 748 acres of historic farmland that has been actively farmed under the ownership of Dodie Gann and her late husband, Ernie, through a lasting partnership with their farm manager, Gregg Black. In 1990 the Ganns protected the large working farm through a conservation easement donated to the San Juan Preservation Trust. Up to 11 future home sites can be built but they must be tucked away into the edges of the vast property. Today, Red Mill Farm produces hay and beef cattle. Careful stewardship has prevented encroachment by invasive hawthorn, and fences and structures have been carefully maintained. Protection of the land through a conservation easement has kept the farm and valley from being divided into smaller ranchettes, offering a visual reminder of the earlier days of farming in San Juan County, when large tracts of land were actively farmed throughout the valley.

Present. Starting in the 1980s, farming on San Juan began to increase again, but this time with smaller market gardens, while the larger, livestock-based farms continued on a more marginal basis. There is an active farmers’ market in Friday Harbor, which also has vendors from Waldron, during the spring, summer, and early fall. In 2008, the San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild was formed to promote the establishment of a permanent farmers’ market in Friday Harbor. Today, several farms produce crops for sale at the farmers’ market, community supported agriculture, restaurants, and stores. Pelindaba Lavender Farm, established in 1998, offers many lavender products both locally and regionally. San Juan Vineyards was established in 1996, producing Madeleine Angevine and Siegerrebe grapes locally as well as importing red grapes from the Yakima Valley to produce red wines. Westcott Bay Cider, established in 1990s, produced its first hard cider in 1999, and has won several awards for its varieties. The newly-established San Juan Island Distillery won two awards for its apple eau de vie in its first months.

San Juan Island



Orcas Island



Orcas Island

Orcas Island, the largest of the San Juan Islands (56.9 square miles or 36,432 acres), is a horseshoe-shaped island with several fertile valleys held within higher mountains and terrain.

Orcas has over 4,000 acres of public lands, including Moran State Park, with Mt Constitution (elevation 2409 ft.) as the highest point in the islands, and Cascade Lake, the largest lake in the islands. Turtleback Mountain on the southwest side of Orcas, was conserved by the San Juan Preservation Trust and SJC Land Bank in 2007 and is home to over 1500 acres of high rocky bald, Garry oak habitat, and diverse native forest. The Town of Eastsound is the largest and most central commercial area on Orcas, but Deer Harbor, West Sound, Orcas Landing, and Olga also have smaller but important commercial hubs. The Washington State Ferry terminal is located on the southeast end of the island at Orcas Landing; there is an airport at Eastsound.

Past. The mountainous geography of Orcas resulted in small pockets of isolated farmland throughout the large island. Transportation from one part of the island to another was difficult due to the varied and steep terrain. Historically, this geography led, in part, to the development of a rich fruit growing tradition on the island. The fruit industry in San Juan County took off during the 1890s. Italian prune-plums were first planted on Orcas in the mid-1870s, followed by apples and pears, as well as apricots, cherries, peaches, and plums. The island’s primary market was Seattle, although fruit producers also shipped to Bellingham, Port Townsend, Tacoma, and Victoria. James Tulloch on Orcas estimated that he shipped a total of 75,000 boxes of apples, or 3-4,000 boxes annually at the height, over his thirty-five year career. Overall annual shipments from Eastsound were estimated at 25-30,000 boxes per year each of apples and pears, with additional thousands going out from Olga, Orcas Village, and West Sound. From the late 1920s to 1940s, strawberries were a major crop on Orcas, especially in Olga and Doe Bay. In 1937, 114 tons of strawberries were produced and shipped from Orcas. In the late 19th century, dairying became an important element in the agricultural landscape of Orcas Island. Increased dairy production in turn led to the establishment of a creamery in East Sound in 1901.

Case Study: Coffelt Farm, Orcas Island

Protected by San Juan County Land Bank, 1995, 2010



Vern and Sidney Coffelt Photo: P. Bill

Coffelt Farm is located in the northern end of Crow Valley, Orcas Island’s largest and most historic agricultural area. Vern and Sidney Coffelt farmed the land for over 60 years. Their love of the farm and farming is deeply rooted. Realizing that their children were not interested in continuing to farm the land, Vern and Sidney began looking for options that would ensure that the farm was protected and actively farmed into the future. In 1995, they sold a conservation easement to San Juan County Land Bank, advancing their vision for the future of the farm, and accomplishing an important element of the Land Bank’s mandate to preserve working agricultural lands. In 2010, they sold the remainder interest to the Land Bank, retaining the right to live in the farmhouse as long as they wanted.

In January of 2011, their vision of keeping the farm actively producing was fully realized when the Land Bank leased the farm to a small Orcas Island based non-profit, Coffelt Farm Stewards (CFS). Today, CFS is responsible for ongoing management of the farm. Scheduled events and educational programs will continue to reflect the public investment in the farm, including field research trials of grain crops, classes in beekeeping, and orchard care and pruning. CFS will seek to be a self-sustaining operation. Vern and Sidney continue to live on the farm, delighted that their vision has become a reality.

Present. Today, farming on Orcas Island is still characterized by small pockets of farms scattered throughout the island in Deer Harbor, West Sound, East Sound, Warm Valley/Orcas Landing, Olga, Buck Bay, and Doe Bay, with the larger farms located in the fertile Crow Valley. Very few of the old island family farms are still in existence. Several historic barns and remnants of the historic orchards serve as a reminder of Orcas’ productive agricultural history. Livestock, including cattle and sheep, still play a dominant

role in the Orcas agriculture industry profile. Over the last several decades, there has been a dramatic increase in small, diversified farms dedicated to growing crops for sale at the thriving farmers’ market as well as to high-end restaurants that source local foods. The Orcas Island Farmers’ Market in Eastsound operates from May through October, and is filled with the produce and products grown by island farmers. Orcas is also home to two oyster farms located at Judd Cove and Crescent Beach. These high quality oysters are sought after by discerning chefs in Seattle and beyond. In the last decade, several large historic farms in Crow Valley have been permanently protected, including the 185-acre Coffelt Farm, conserved by the San Juan County Land Bank, and the 332-acre Clark Farm, conserved by the San Juan Preservation Trust. Both of these will serve as anchors to support future farming efforts on Orcas, and especially in Crow Valley.

Lopez Island

Lopez, the third largest island in the San Juan archipelago, is 29.5 square miles or 18,847 acres with one of the flattest topographies of the islands.

Agricultural land is situated over most of Lopez Island, with a large concentration in Center Valley. Villages and hamlets developed in response to settlements in various parts of the island: Lopez Village in the west center, Richardson on the south end, and Port Stanley to the northeast. The Washington State Ferry terminal is located on the north end of the island, near Upright Head; there is an airport located on the west side of the island.

Past. Lopez was settled as early as the 1850s, and homesteaded as soon as the islands were officially declared US territory in the mid-1870s. As on the other islands, homesteaders originally established subsistence farms; however, during the 1880s and 1890s a group of immigrants began farming on a larger scale. Grain crops included barley, oats, wheat, and dry peas. The wetter, poorly drained soils of Center Valley proved excellent for some grain production because of the retention of moisture during the long, dry summer season. At first, grain was threshed with horses and winnowed with cross breezes in center-drive barns. In 1876 John Bartlett, of Lopez, brought the first threshing machine—an 8-horsepower “Sweepstake”—to the islands. Most farmers also had poultry as part of their farmsteads: a few dozen chickens and perhaps some geese and turkeys. During the late 1890s-early 1900s, Ben Lichtenberg’s GEM Farm on Lopez specialized in Plymouth Rock cockerels and White Holland turkeys. Lopez farm-ers also ran extensive livestock, at first primarily dairy cattle. In the early 1900s a creamery was established at Richardson, and 1,500 pounds of butter a month were shipped to local cities such as

Case Study: Ellis Ranch, Lopez Island

Protected by San Juan Preservation Trust, 1985



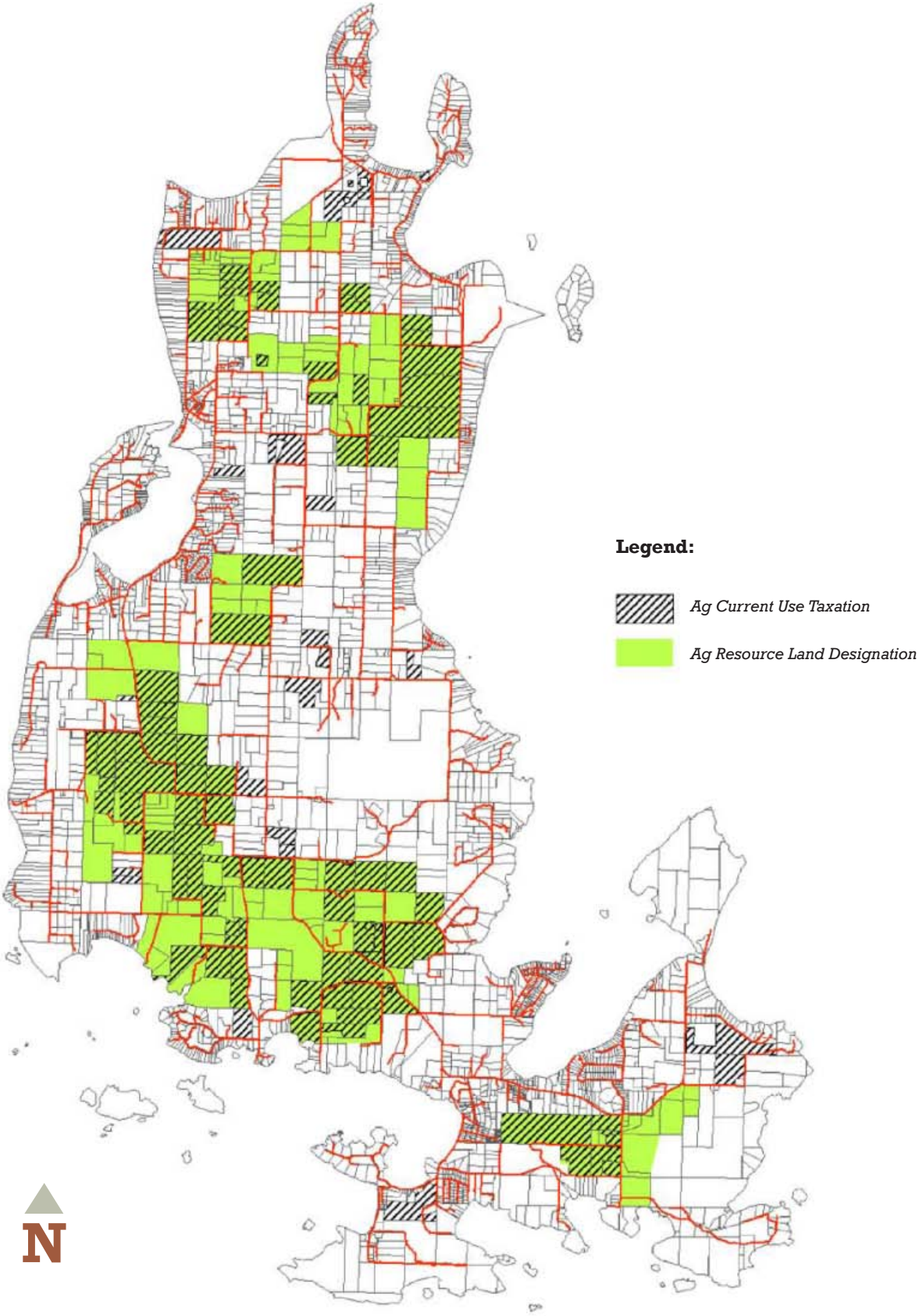
Photo: D. Hatch

In 1985, Fred and Marilyn Ellis donated a conservation easement to San Juan Preservation Trust on their 313-acre working ranch in Lopez Island’s Port Stanley area. The conservation easement ensures that the farm pastures and fields remain undeveloped and available for agricultural purposes in perpetuity. Subdivision was limited to 40 acres or larger parcels, with a maximum of 6 residences allowed on the periphery so as not to impact the agricultural lands. Today, this valley is home to some of Lopez Islands’ most successful commercial farmers, including Sweetgrass Farm, raising Wagyu beef; Horse Drawn Farm, a diverse family farm that grows market crops and meats using mostly horse-drawn power; and T&D Farm, raising certified organic poultry for eggs, market crops, and starts. The purchase price of the land was more affordable for farmers due to the limited opportunity to develop. The adjoining historic Port Stanley Schoolhouse, carefully restored to its original condition, and the surrounding forest are also protected, further contributing to the sense of history in this productive agricultural farmshed.

Anacortes, Bellingham, and Seattle. Farmers also established orchards on several of the farms on the island, including extensive plantings near Lopez Village. This pattern of farming continued into the late 1950s and early 1960s, when transportation costs began to cut into profits.

Present. Lopez has a legacy of livestock pasturing and haying from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, resulting in some of the largest farm holdings in the county. A high percentage of historically-farmed lands are currently leased. Today, there are several diversified farms, offering produce such as beef, sheep and wool products, pork, berries, and market garden produce.

Lopez Island



In addition, Lopez Island Vineyards, which began operations in 1987, grows grape varieties such as Madeleine Angevine and Siegerrebe for their white wines and imports red grapes from the Yakima and Columbia valleys for their red wines. An active farmers’ market is held in Lopez Village on Saturdays during the summer months. Several farms supply local produce to restaurants and stores on the island. There are a few large livestock operations on Lopez, including Buffum Brothers Farms, who own and lease hundreds of acres for hay production and grazing. More recently, Saddleback Farm raises over 300 sheep by moving them from one pasture to another throughout the year. As a result, Lopez has more acres of leased farmland than land that is farmed by its owners.

Shaw Island

Shaw Island, the smallest of the ferry-served islands, has a small proportion of farmland, but is centrally located among the islands.

Past. Like the other islands, Shaw was initially settled by homesteaders, with the peak occurring in the 1890s. These farmers practiced a diversified, largely subsistence agriculture on the scattered portions of good soil on the island. They raised diverse crops such as hay, grains, and livestock (cattle, sheep, and hogs). Most farmers also had poultry as part of their farmsteads: a few dozen chickens and perhaps some geese and turkeys. However, during the late 1800s Shaw island farmers began to raise chickens for eggs for sale commercially. In the 1930s, the census reported over 35,000 chickens in San Juan County; apparently, in 1936 90% of these were on Shaw! In 1940, Shaw shipped out 3400 cases of eggs. Turkeys also became an important crop in the 1930s, with some 15,000 birds counted countywide in 1936. While turkey production proved ephemeral—there was an additional brief ‘spikelet’ in the 1950s—chicken numbers countywide remained in the 20-25,000 range until the 1960s, when they began to fall off precipitously. During the early 1900s, the Bruns family raised both seed and root ginseng on their Shaw Island farm for some twenty years. They had about three acres under cover, and used maple leaves as mulch. The crop was sold to the International Ginseng Company in New York City as well as Chinese merchants in Vancouver, BC. At one point they sold it for as high as \$11.00 a pound; however, during the year of their best harvest—a ton—they only got \$.75 per pound!

Present. Today there are very few farms on Shaw. Most are family farms with a few livestock such as cattle, goats, and sheep, and the fields managed for hay and pasture. One of the three certified dairies in San Juan County is run by the Benedictine nuns of Our Lady of the Rock Monastery. In addition to milking Jersey cows, they raise Scotch Highland cattle, Cotswold sheep, alpacas, and llamas, as well as swine and poultry. The nuns also raise produce and herbs, make cheeses, jams and condiments, all for sale to local residents of Shaw.



Blue Moon Produce, Waldron Island

Waldron Island

Waldron Island has a distinctive character and charm. There is no ferry service to the island, so transport to and from is by private boat, plane, or the island transport.

Residents of Waldron are resourceful and enterprising, choosing to live ‘off the grid’ and away from many of the amenities of more developed areas. Of significance to farming, there are no deer on Waldron Island due to the long distance from the other islands, making it possible to grow foods without construction of high deer fences.

Past. Waldron Island was first settled by homesteaders in the late 1860s. As with other farms in the islands, these families raised their own produce and had small amounts of livestock, principally for subsistence.

Present. Today, there are many thriving subsistence as well as commercial farms on Waldron. Beginning in the 1970s, several market gardens were established, including Nootka Rose and Thousand Flower farms, joined later by Blue Moon Produce. These dedicated growers sell at the farmers’ markets on San Juan and on Orcas Islands. They also are major suppliers of fresh produce to the local food co-op and local restaurants on San Juan. Flowers grown on Thousand Flower Farm are also delivered weekly during the summer to regular customers in Friday Harbor, and abundant flowers from Blue Moon Produce grace the Orcas Farmers’ Market.

Section 2:
Farmland in San Juan County

According to data from the USDA censuses, the amount of farmland in San Juan County has fallen from a historical high of 68,513 acres in 1920 to 21,452 in 2007, the latest census. In 2008-2009, the San Juan County Agricultural Resources Committee, through a grant from the Washington State Office of Farmland Preservation, looked for patterns of farmland loss by mapping all agriculturally viable parcels within the county.



Straights View
Photo: Boyd Pratt

This analysis was based on the latest online soil survey of San Juan County conducted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. (The definition and mapping of agricultural land in San Juan County’s Uniform Development Code is based upon an earlier [1962] soil survey.) The survey concluded that the greatest loss of farmland in San Juan County resulted from the division of larger farms into smaller parcels, which were then developed or allowed to lie fallow.

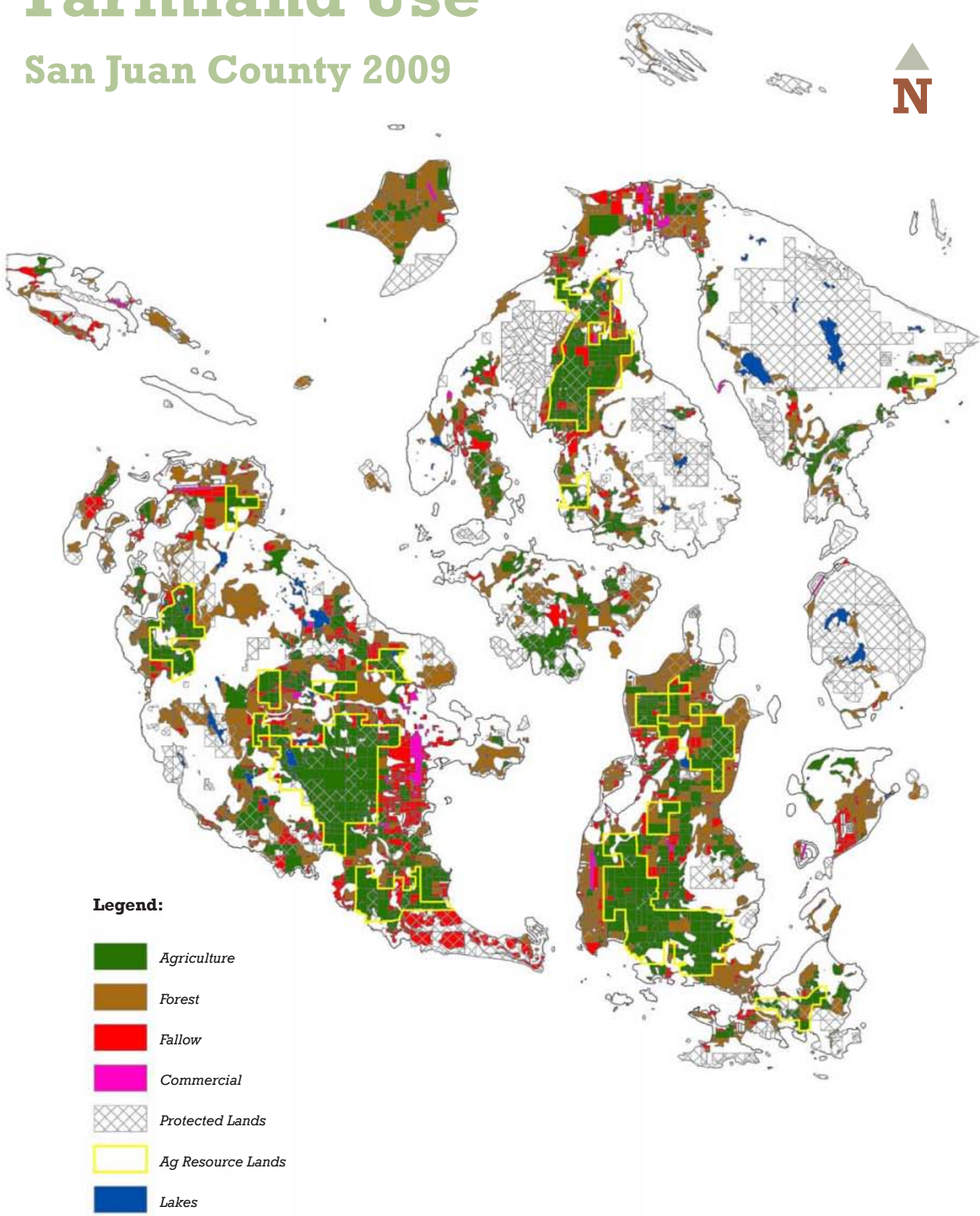
Table of Land Use in San Juan County					
(Mapping Agricultural Land in San Juan County, WA 2009)					
Landuse	Number of Parcels	Mean Size	Ag Soil Area	Parcel Acres	%
Commercial	128	9.5	868	1,215	2
Fallow	983	10.0	6,956	9,835	13
Agricultural	1,115	22.5	19,908	25,069	34
Forest	2,449	15.2	18,060	37,140	51
Total	4,675		45,792	73,259	100

As part of this grant, this study was taken further in order to identify all actively-farmed land in San Juan County (see Appendix 3: Mapping Priority Farmland for Preservation). Based on this analysis, there are 14,930 acres of actively-farmed on the three major islands—San Juan, Orcas, and Lopez. There are several significant differences between the islands in regard to the size, ownership, and use of farmland (see charts page 23). For instance, despite its relative overall size (largest of the islands), Orcas has the least amount of parcels and acres in Agricultural Current Use Taxation, as opposed to San Juan and Lopez. While both San Juan and Orcas have close to the county average of 30 acres per parcel, Lopez’s is lower: 25 acres. Furthermore, Lopez has the highest percentage of leased parcels, in contrast to San Juan and Orcas. These facts have implications for farmland preservation. For instance, with smaller parcels of farmland, and a higher percentage of leased farmland, there is a greater chance of ‘buildout’—that is, development of farmland into residential sites—on Lopez.

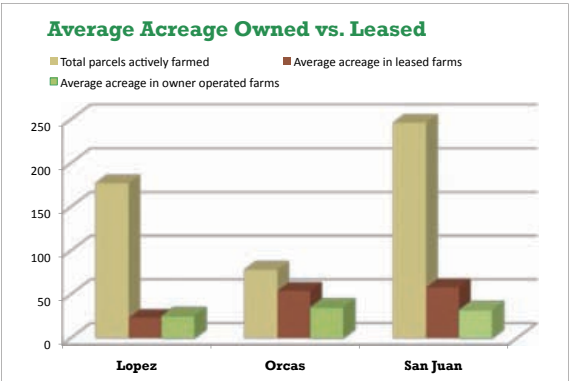
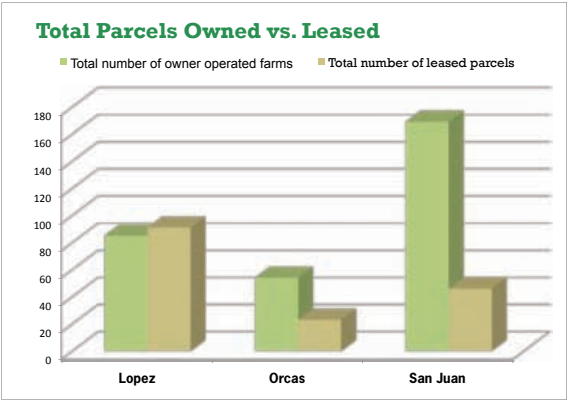
Historically, the agricultural development in the San Juans of pasture for livestock and fields for hay and grains led to a land pattern of large, open fields on large parcels. However, with the decline in the dairy industry and gradual abandonment of actively-managed pasture, historic farms have been subdivided into smaller parcels, and are often not farmed by their owners. Farmland is either left fallow or leased for grazing or haying, with little to no improvement

Farmland Use

San Juan County 2009



of field quality, leading to mining of soil nutrients and gradual impoverishment of the agricultural quality of the land. Aside from livestock and hay, most active farm operations such as market gardens occur on relatively smaller parcels of less than 20 acres.



Comprehensive Plan Land Use Designations

During the 1970s, San Juan County went through the process of adopting a Comprehensive Plan. As part of the Plan, the islands were zoned according to various resource types. One of these was Agricultural Resource Land (ARL), which was based on the location of prime soils (according to the USDA 1962 San Juan County Soil Survey) as well as the evidence of groupings of historically farmed land. ARL is zoned for a minimum density of 40 acre parcels, although in some areas this has been reduced to 5 acres. There are currently 652 parcels comprising 13,891 acres of land in ARL in San Juan County. In addition, the category Rural Farm Forest (RFF), which is zoned with a minimum density of 5 acre parcels, supports some farms and agricultural enterprises.



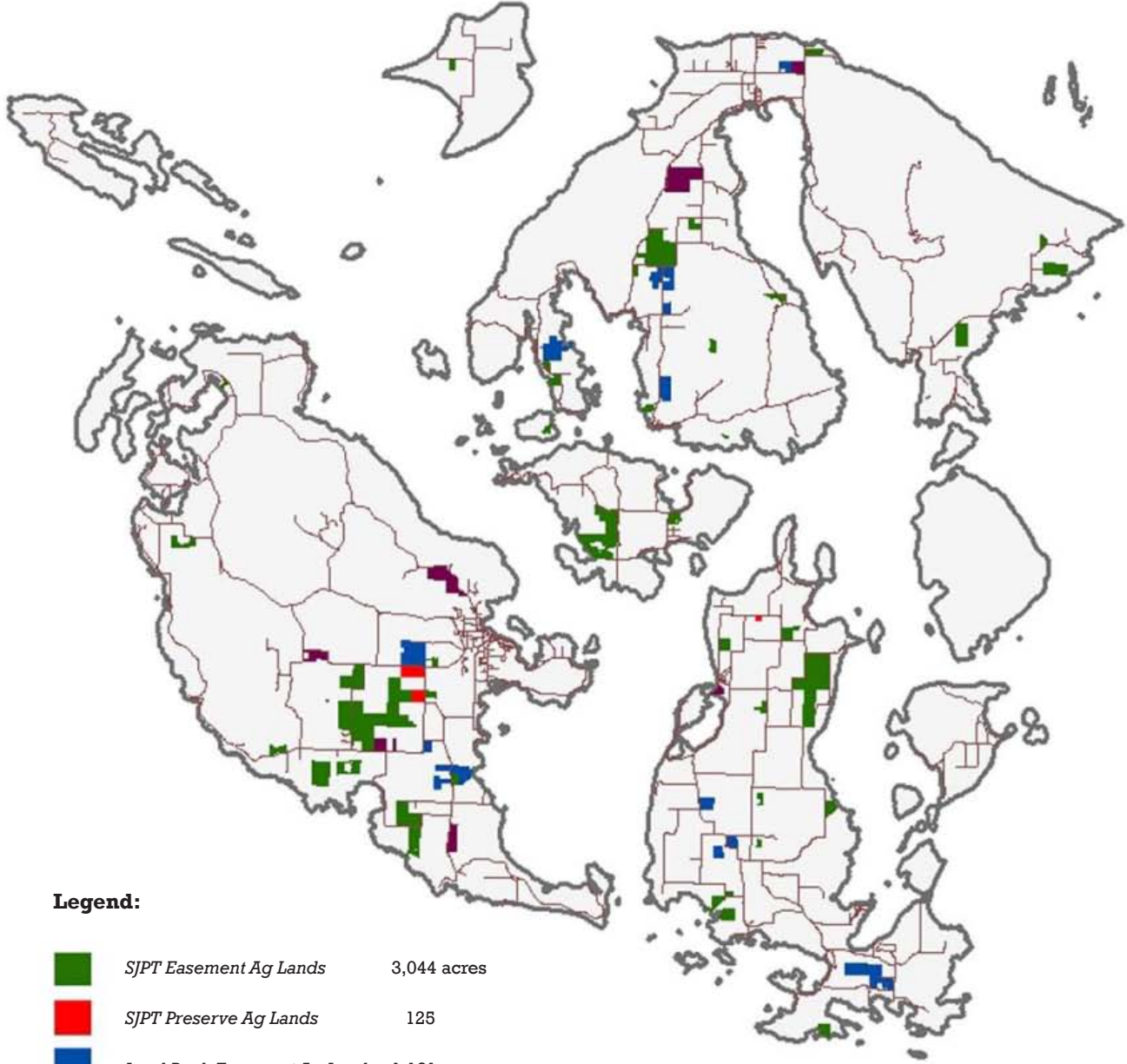
Farmers on parade.
Photo: San Juan County Land Bank

Conserved Farmland





San Juan County has a strong land conservation ethic, as is evident in the success of the San Juan Preservation Trust and the San Juan County Land Bank (see Appendix 7: Lead Organizations). The Trust and the Land Bank collaborate on selected projects, including those involving farmland, in order to leverage public and private funding and to layer protections.

San Juan Preservation Trust	
Number of conservation easements held:	213
Acres of land in conservation easements:	12,792
Number of preserves (lands owned by the SJPT):	49
Acres of land in preserves:	1,473
Acres of farmland in conservation easement:	3,044
Acres of farmland preserves:	125
San Juan County Land Bank	
Acres of land in conservation easements:	2,079
Acres of land in preserves:	3,580
Acres of farmland in conservation easement:	1,121
Acres of farmland preserves:	577
Total acres of farmland in conservation easement:	4,165
Total acres of farmland preserves:	702
Total acres of farmland conserved:	4,867

Conserved Farmland



Legend:

	<i>SJPT Easement Ag Lands</i>	3,044 acres
	<i>SJPT Preserve Ag Lands</i>	125
	<i>Land Bank Easement Ag Lands</i>	1,121
	<i>Land Bank Preserve Ag Lands</i>	577
Total		4,867 acres

Agricultural Taxation Programs

Agricultural Current Use Taxation. The Open Space Taxation Act (RCW 84.34), enacted by the Washington State legislature in 1970, allows property owners to have their open space, agricultural, and timber lands valued at their current use rather than at their highest and best use. These programs support the public benefit of encouraging and helping ongoing commercial use of our resource lands as well as protection of key habitat and open space features. Currently, there are 425 tax parcels, comprising approximately 11,595 acres, under the San Juan County Agricultural Current Use Taxation (AgCUT) program. Properties that are enrolled in AgCUT typically receive about 70% tax reduction; however the landowner must pay interest, back taxes, and a penalty when taken out of the program. For more details, go to www.sanjuanco.com/assessor/current.aspx.

Farm and Agriculture Conservation Land Program. In 2011, the San Juan County Council adopted the Farm and Agriculture Conservation Land (FACL) Program, which is incorporated into the county's Public Benefit Rating System (SJCC Chapter 16.50). The FACL program offers reduced property taxes for lands that may not be eligible for AgCUT, but that are being maintained for future commercial agricultural use. Requirements include:

- ❖ A history of agricultural use
- ❖ Subdividable for residential use if the farmland is outside of Resource Land zoning
- ❖ Five or more acres of farmland
- ❖ Soils identified as Prime Agricultural soils within the latest Soil Survey of San Juan County
- ❖ A farm plan detailing maintenance of the land for future commercial agricultural activity
- ❖ A noxious weed plan to prevent encroachment
- ❖ Removal or transferral of the farm from the program within ten years, unless protected by a conservation easement prohibiting development inconsistent with agricultural use

(See Appendix 5: San Juan County Agricultural Taxation Programs.)

Case Study: Heritage Farm, San Juan Island

Protected by San Juan County Land Bank, 2003, 2009



Photo: Boyd Pratt

The Land Bank purchased a conservation easement on this scenic 39-acre farm to preserve in perpetuity its rural character and the opportunities for future farming enterprises. Jim and Christina Dahl-Sesby raise hay, market crops, and pasture-fed turkeys and chickens on their farm. Funds from the sale of the conservation easement also allowed the farmers to invest in their farm, including establishment of one of the county's three Certified Dairies. A stout red barn houses a team of draft horses that are used to do much of the agriculture work. This working farm with its open expanse of pasture is quite visible from Cattle Point Road, which leads to American Camp National Park on the south end of San Juan Island. In 2009, the Dahl-Sesbys sold additional development rights to protect additional farmland through a conservation easement.

“The beauty that we see in the vernacular landscape is the image of our common humanity: hard work, stubborn hope, and mutual forbearance striving to be love.”
~ J.B. Jackson

Section 3:
Recommendations

To identify priorities for conserving farmland and strengthening the agricultural economy, the Steering Committee of the Agricultural Strategic Plan asked San Juan County farmers and stakeholders to rank a list of thirteen Goals and Issues generated from outreach meetings on each of the major islands and an Agricultural Resources Committee retreat.



Horsedrawn Farm
Photo: Scott Hatch

Of these, the following categories emerged as the highest priorities: **Farmland Preservation** (Preserve farmland for farming); **Regulations** (Adopt and promote scale-appropriate state and local regulations in order to foster farm businesses and support a thriving local farm economy); **Farmers** (Promote opportunities for new farmers in San Juan County); **Infrastructure & Inputs** (Develop adequate access to infrastructure necessary to process and maintain diverse agricultural operations); and **Marketing** (Expand local and regional market opportunities). Additionally, it was decided that **Organizational Collaboration** should be included as a paramount priority. It is proposed that a collaborative approach be developed to establish an organizational capacity necessary and sufficient to achieve successful results.

Beyond these top priorities, other goals were identified and ranked in the following order of priority: **Education** (Strengthen sustainable local food systems through education); **Housing** (Promote affordable farm housing options); **Water** (Ensure access to water for crop production); **Soil** (Maintain and enhance soil fertility); **Access to Capital** (Provide access to capital essential to start-up and growth); **Research** (Strengthen sustainable local food systems through research); and **Climate Change** (Adapt to the impacts of climate change). (For a description of the survey process and full list of

Priorities, see Appendices.) In addition, several other issues emerged as important to stakeholders.

The first priority, necessary to achieve success, is to increase organizational capacity to support farming, conservation of farmland, and expansion of agricultural economy. Successful implementation of strategic actions would involve a formalized collaborative approach bringing together committed organizations with expertise in key elements that strengthen agriculture in San Juan County.

Another goal that was identified is to establish San Juan County as a Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)-free zone, banning GMO seeds from the county and encouraging the production of GMO-free seed in the islands.

It is important to note that many, if not all, of these priority goals, issues, and actions are intertwined, and achieving success on one priority will necessarily require progress on others as well. As the saying goes: “it is not farmland without farmers,” highlighting the need to conserve farmland, create opportunities for farmers to have affordable access to good farmland, and while also seeking to promote a sustainable and thriving agricultural economy that will keep the farmers in business and support good stewardship of the land to restore and promote soil fertility.

Farmland Preservation

Goal: Preserve farmland for farming.

Issue: Increasing land values and shifting demographics in San Juan County have resulted in subdivision and conversion of farmland and historic farmland that is left fallow. Over the last 50 years, San Juan County has shifted from an agrarian economy to a tourist destination with vacation and retirement homes, resulting in real estate prices that reflect non-agricultural uses. Conservation organizations are challenged by the task of managing conserved farmland.

Actions:

❖ **Conduct regular updates to identify and map priority farmland for conservation.** One of the goals of this grant was to identify and map priority farmland, based on a combination of criteria, including size, threat, connectivity to other farmland, history of farming, current use, etc. (above), thus establishing a database for future conservation decisions. A current list of priority properties for conservation has been compiled. Looking ahead, the Agricultural Resources Committee, San Juan Preservation Trust, and San Juan County Land Bank should meet yearly to assess past farmland conservation efforts and update the list to identify opportunities and available funding.

❖ **Research and promote public/private strategies to increase funding and incentives for conservation.** San Juan County currently has two very active land conservation programs: the private non-profit San Juan Preservation Trust and the public San Juan County Land Bank. The primary sources of funding for the former are private donations; for the latter, a real estate excise tax on all land purchases in the county. Identifying ways to expand the work of these groups, as well as exploring the potential for other groups to work in this area, is encouraged. The San Juan County Land Bank charter is currently scheduled to sunset in 2014. The Land Bank is pivotal to the success of farmland conservation in San Juan County, so the renewal of its charter is essential for continued funding for farmland preservation.

❖ **Establish and foster a public/private collaborative approach to conserving farmland.** Both the San Juan Preservation Trust and the San Juan County Land Bank have been key players in the conservation of farmland in San Juan County. Successful conservation of farmland must go beyond preservation of the land, to include sustainable management, effective lease agreements, finding farmers to farm the land, and identifying funding to contribute to ongoing costs or to provide micro-loans for start-up or infrastructure. Collaboration with other organizations, or even the formation of a separate entity to coordinate these efforts, could strengthen and embolden ongoing conservation of active farmland. See Appendix 1, Models for Farming on Conserved Farmland.

❖ **Research feasibility of a Transfer of Development Rights program to protect farmlands in areas threatened by change in zoning (such as farmland adjoining Urban Growth Areas).** Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) are typically used as a means of

protecting resource or open space lands by selling and transferring the development rights to a private developer or entity for use in areas specifically identified by a public jurisdiction for increased density. Although TDRs are associated with areas that have more of a disparity in value between urban and rural land values, it is worthwhile researching this tool in the case of urban growth areas such as Friday Harbor, Eastsound and Lopez Village.

❖ **Promote and establish increased incentives for participation in farmland conservation tax programs and propose tax policies that address succession issues for farmers nearing retirement.** San Juan County offers Agricultural Current Use Taxation (AgCUT) as an incentive for commercial use of agricultural resource lands. Recently, this has been expanded by the adoption of the Farm and Agriculture Conservation Program, which allows owners of land that was once commercially farmed to gain preferential tax benefits by managing the land for future commercial use. Aging farmers enrolled in AgCUT may be forced to sell or subdivide their land in order to pay the penalty, back taxes, and interest if they are no longer able to meet the AgCUT requirement to farm the land for commercial purposes. Amendments to state or local regulations to address this issue would benefit ongoing protection of active farmland.

❖ **Educate elected officials and key stakeholders about opportunities and benefits of protecting farmland.** Studies by the American Farmland Trust have documented that undeveloped lands such as farmland use far fewer public services, and thus fewer public funds, than land developed for residential or commercial uses. Elected officials and key stakeholders need to be informed of the value of protecting farmland in the county: not only its economic, environmental, aesthetic, associative, cultural, and historical value but also what it offers in remaining farmland as opposed to being developed.

Outcomes:

❖ A collaborative approach to farmland conservation will be established and fully endorsed by the Agricultural Resources Committee, San Juan Preservation Trust, San Juan County Land Bank, other agricultural stakeholders and organizations, and public agencies, and will result in increased commitment and actions to sustainable conservation and management of farmland.

❖ Public and private funding for farmland conservation will be readily available; the San Juan County Land Bank charter will be renewed.

❖ There will be a 50% increase in acres of priority farmland permanently conserved for future generations of farmers.

❖ The number of acres of farmland currently enrolled in Agricultural Current Use Taxation will be maintained or increased.

❖ Tax policies and incentives that promote ongoing protection of farmland will be adopted.

Regulations

Goal: Adopt and promote scale-appropriate state and local regulations in order to foster farm businesses and support a thriving local farm economy.

Issue: The average size of a farm in San Juan County is 20 acres, and many federal, state, and local regulations are not appropriate to the smaller scale of farming. Regulations that were written to apply to large-scale operations do not fit with the scale of farming in the islands. Many are burdensome to small farmers, inefficient in achieving their intended results, and actually harmful to good farming practices and economic development.

Actions:

- ❖ **Promote and adopt scale-appropriate policies and regulations that support sustainable agricultural practices and marketing and processing opportunities.** As issues arise, the San Juan County Agricultural Resources Committee should analyze, research, and promote legislation that will alleviate and streamline the regulatory processes that affect commercial agriculture in San Juan County. Scale-appropriate regulations may address use of home kitchens for “shelf stable” food products, small dairies producing milk for local consumption, or requirements for handling of salad greens and other fresh produce.
- ❖ **Streamline permits, conduct regulatory reform, and research innovative incentive-based approaches and regulatory programs.** The SJC Agricultural Resources Committee should engage with farmers in examining the regulatory factors affecting farming in San Juan County, and then make recommendations for appropriate modification and reform.
- ❖ **Work with regional organizations to modify and promote statewide adoption of the Small Farm Intern Pilot Program.** Initially proposed by the SJC Agricultural Resources Committee, and then passed by the Washington State Legislature in 2010, the Small Farm Internship Pilot Program is currently being tested in two counties—Skagit and San Juan. Statewide adoption of the pilot program will enable small farms to legally use interns, helping to train a new generation of farmers.
- ❖ **Coordinate with other county and regional organizations to promote initiatives and county-wide resolutions that support sustainable agriculture in San Juan County.** The SJC Agricultural Resources Committee should work with other county and regional organizations in the realm of legislation and regulation in order to ensure that San Juan County farmers are supported in their work.

Outcomes:

- ❖ Scale-appropriate policies and regulations will be adopted to support farm operations in San Juan County.
- ❖ Innovative approaches will be identified to offer scale-appropriate solutions to regulations (such as poultry processing units, cooperative mobile processing units, etc).
- ❖ The Small Farm Intern Pilot Program will be adopted statewide.

Farmers

Goal: Promote opportunities for new farmers to establish successful farms in San Juan County.

Issue: With an average age of farmers in San Juan County at 61.8 years, there is a need for a new generation of farmers. New farmers need affordable access to land, whether leased or through a purchase; training; mentoring; and access to capital in order to start their own operations.

Actions:

- ❖ **Develop and promote programs for new farmers including transfer of knowledge through incubator programs, mentoring, and educational and vocational training programs.** To be successful, new farmers need, and actively seek, information and knowledge about all aspects of farming in the San Juan Islands. Support, classes, and mentoring should be offered in areas such as crop selection, marketing, small business development, and sustainable land management. This comes in many forms, ranging from on-the-ground experience to mentoring by established farmers, to classes on agronomy. The Agricultural Resources Committee, in cooperation with WSU Extension and other institutions and organizations, can offer this type of education.
- ❖ **Establish website and database to connect farmers seeking farmland with landowners who want their land farmed.** New farmers are often looking for land to farm. Establishing a program through the web and database, that would link farmers seeking land with owners seeking farmers (see *Farmland*, previous page), would help.
- ❖ **Establish model lease agreements and other resources for use by farmers and farmland owners.** Providing model lease agreements as well as other legal documents, such as succession planning, will help ease the burden of farm ownership and use.
- ❖ **Coordinate with conservation organizations to establish collaborative programs that facilitate training for new farmers with access to conserved farmland.** Local conservation organizations have missions to conserve farmland and to promote agriculture and education. Farmland held by conservation organizations has the stability and security necessary for long-term programs and leases. These lands offer a link from agricultural education to learning while leasing, and eventually to owning a farm.
- ❖ **Research and propose innovative solutions to provide affordable on-farm housing for new farmers.** Leasing or renting a house in the San Juan Islands is often expensive, especially when compared to the income available from farming. Change in housing policies and regulations is needed for both new farmers and retiring farmers. In partnership with affordable housing organizations, research into the feasibility of collaborative approaches to building low-cost housing for farmers and farm workers should be conducted.

Outcomes:

- ❖ The average age of farmers in San Juan County will hold steady or drop, as the turnover of new farmers balances the number of retiring farmers.
- ❖ There will be an active farm internship program that offers educational and vocational training to new farmers.
- ❖ The Farmland Link Program will join new farmers with interested landowners, resulting in a 20% increase in farmland being actively farmed over current levels.
- ❖ All farmland owned by San Juan County Land Bank and the San Juan Preservation Trust will be leased for sustainable farming.

Infrastructure and Inputs

Goal: Develop adequate access to infrastructure necessary to process and maintain diverse agricultural operations.

Issue: San Juan County does not have adequate infrastructure for processing and storage of agricultural products. While there is a historic legacy of cooperative-based storage and processing facilities on several of the islands, there is little to no accessible or commonly-owned facilities. Geographic isolation from the mainland and between islands adds to the high costs and complexity of building infrastructure that serves the needs of all the islands. The islands are dependent upon ferry transportation, both for exports of produce and livestock, and for imports of fuel, soil amendments, building materials, and farm supplies.

Actions:

- ❖ **Utilize website and database to connect farmers to land with existing infrastructure and coordinate cooperative transportation of products and purchase of materials.** The same mechanism that is used to connect farmers seeking land with farmland owners seeking farmers can be used to establish connections with infrastructure and inputs (as part of the database description). The logistics of bulk purchasing, transportation, and storage of materials essential to farming operations in the islands would need to be developed.
- ❖ **Research feasibility and funding opportunities for development of local processing facilities.** Processing facilities, such as a USDA-certified local butcher shop, certified kitchen, mobile poultry slaughter units, and cold storage, can be developed, as appropriate for each island and processing and marketing situation.
- ❖ **Promote creation of a commercial composting facility on each ferry-served island.** Compost is an essential material for most produce-oriented agricultural operations. The creation of a commercial composting facility on each major island would not only provide material for local farms, but also absorb a large amount of the solid waste that is generated locally but shipped off-island to landfills.
- ❖ **Explore tax incentives or other programs to address infrastructure.** The high cost of infrastructure is a challenge for both new and established farmers in the islands. The creation of

a funding source for infrastructure, financed through either a tax incentive program or some sort of revolving fund would help alleviate this situation.

Outcomes:

- ❖ Systems are developed to coordinate linkage of farmers with farms and collaborate on the procurement and transportation of materials.
- ❖ Commercial and farm-based composting facilities will be functioning on each island, providing a reliable source of local organic compost for increasing soil fertility.
- ❖ Federal and state approved processing and storage facilities have been established on the major islands, or will be mobile or transportable to serve county-wide needs.
- ❖ Microloans and other sources of finance are available for farmers and producers to establish infrastructure.

Marketing

Goal: Develop strong local and regional market opportunities in order to sustain and expand the local agricultural economy.

Issue: Local markets are limited mainly to farmers’ markets, restaurants, and some grocery stores. These venues do not provide adequate capacity for marketing of local products. Marketing out of county has challenges due to the costs and time requirements of ferry transportation. It is both expensive and time consuming to haul local produce to off-island markets.

Actions:

- ❖ **Expand Agricultural Resources Committee’s *Island Grown* program to promote and strengthen markets for locally grown and harvested products, and to increase awareness of the community benefits of a strong local food system.** The Agricultural Resources Committee’s *Island Grown* program already has a substantial number of participants. Expansion of this program will help farmers, restaurants, and retail outlets recognize the contribution of local agricultural products to the islands’ economy.
- ❖ **Expand local produce section in island markets.** The Agricultural Resources Committee and local farmers’ organizations can work with island markets to promote marketing of locally-produced farm goods. Clearly articulated policies for acceptance and sale of these products will help establish standard commercial relations.
- ❖ **Promote opportunities for direct sales of local products through support of Farmers’ Markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), etc.** Promotion through various innovative retailing outlets will help advertise and expand the market for local products. Projects such as the development of permanent farmers’ market facilities should be encouraged.
- ❖ **Develop regional markets.** Local agricultural support groups can assist local farms with marketing their products to other islands and the mainland. In conjunction with the *Island Grown*

program, labeling and promoting the unique qualities of island produce will help place their products with niche-conscious marketers.

❖ **Promote agritourism through events such as community dinners, festivals, and other tasting events, to educate both local and visiting consumers about farming in San Juan County and to offer increased revenue for the farm operations.** Local agritourism is growing in the islands, and the success of such events as the Lopez Lamb and Wool Festival, the Doe Bay Garlic Festival, and the Cider and Mead Festival at the Orcas Farmers’ Market suggest that there is a growing interest in local food.

Outcomes:

- ❖ *Island Grown* branding and program will be fully activated, offering direct benefits to members.
- ❖ A significant portion of our local markets will be devoted to locally grown products.
- ❖ Local producers will benefit from a strong regional market for *Island Grown* products.
- ❖ San Juan County will be known for its strong tradition of agritourism events that will educate consumers about the many benefits of a robust local food system, while also providing additional revenue to local farmers and farm-related businesses.

And finally, recommending collaboration for achieving success

Public and private collaboration to establish sufficient organizational capacity is essential to achieving success in expanding and maintaining sustainable farming in the San Juan Islands. Although San Juan County has many organizations that support important aspects of agriculture, there are significant gaps that must be addressed to achieve meaningful progress. Successful implementation of strategic actions would benefit from a formalized collaborative approach. This would bring together committed organizations with expertise in key elements in strengthening agriculture in San Juan County, including: land conservation, sustainable land management, lease agreements, linking farmers to available farmland, business planning, financial support and loans, marketing, and education. The following steps toward implementation would need to be taken:

- ❖ Research existing models to identify most efficient approach to effectively strengthen and advance agriculture in San Juan County; evaluate organizational capacity, strengths and weaknesses; and propose optimal organizational structure or collaborative systems approach.
- ❖ Interview potential partners to evaluate interest and ability to commit time and/or resources.



Sundstrom Farm,
San Juan Island.

Photo: K. Foley, San Juan Preservation Trust

- ❖ Seek funding to support initial start-up and development of collaborative – or other—organization structure.
- ❖ Identify pilot project(s) for early implementation using a collaborative approach; evaluate success and ongoing commitment by partner organizations.
- ❖ Formalize organizational structure and funding to support ongoing implementation of priority projects.
- ❖ Coordinate funding requests to maximize benefit for achieving mutual goals.

Success will be measured by the implementation of collaborative farmland conservation pilot projects that combine conservation of farmland that will be sustainably farmed by a farmer with a viable business plan and clear understanding of market opportunities and targets. This anticipates the establishment of a sustainable collaborative organization that can facilitate the work of diverse agriculture-related organizations, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities of partner organizations, agreement on mutual goals, and with sufficient funding and commitment necessary to staff and implement priority projects. This organization, in turn, would coordinate an annual conference for all local agriculture–related organizations to increase efficiencies and identify common priorities, cooperative opportunities for seeking funding, and collaborative strategies, roles, and actions to achieve success.

Appendices

“What I stand for is what I stand on.”
~ Wendell Berry

Appendix 1
Models for Farming on Conserved Farmland and Linking Farmers to Farmland, with Case Studies

Agriculture and Land Based Association (ALBA)
<http://www.albafarmers.org/>
The mission of the Agriculture and Land-Based Association (ALBA) is to “advance economic viability, social equity and ecological land management among limited-resource and aspiring farmers.” Located in Monterey County, CA, ALBA “provides educational and business opportunities for farmer workers and aspiring farms to grow and sell crops.” Their holistic approach emphasizes human resources, markets, and farm facilities that enhance biological diversity and protect natural resources. Key elements:

- Incubator farms to train new farmers;
- Small farmer training and education program;
- Lease at below market rate to new farmers;
- ALBA Organics—organic market and distribution center.

Equity Trust
<http://www.equitytrust.org>
Land Tenure Issues and Preserving Farms for Farmers
The mission of Equity Trust is “to promote equity in the world by changing the way people think about and hold property.” The Equity Trust works with communities in general and farmers in particular to obtain land by providing counseling on land tenure; offering model legal documents for leases, and easements; and pursuing funding for farming operations.

- Assist other organizations and farmers in protection of farmland;
- Equity Trust Loan Fund low interest loans;
- Equity Trust Loan Fund is capitalized by local lenders and donors;
- Model documents and resources for transfer, leases, etc.

Friends of the Farms
<http://friendsofthefarms.org/>
Working to preserve and enhance local farming on Bainbridge Island, WA.

- Management of public farms purchased by City of Bainbridge;
- Negotiate leases, development of infrastructure;
- Coordinate education program with local schools;
- Promote conservation of farmland on Bainbridge

Jefferson Land Works Collaborative
<http://www.jeffersonlandworks.org>
Keeping the Farms and Forests of Jefferson County, Washington working, productive and profitable.
Jefferson LandWorks Collaborative seeks to keep agricultural and forest land available and affordable in large enough tracts that food and timber operations can be economically viable, to provide small scale farmers and foresters access to the business training, capital, and know-how to be profitable; to ensure that both consumer demand and robust markets are in place to accommodate local food and timber products. Key elements include:

- Collaborative approach to conserving priority farmland;
- Connect farmers to conserved farmland;
- Provide business, financial and market support;
- Prioritize conservation of farms that will be actively farmed and that have a viable business plan.

Collaboration includes 8 partners with expertise in land conservation, education, business, finance, marketing, sustainable management, including Jefferson County Conservation District, Jefferson County Farmers’ Market Assoc, Jefferson Land Trust, Northwest Natural Resource Group, Shore Bank Enterprise Cascadia, Sunfield Farm and School, The Food Co-op, and Washington State University Extension.

Land for Good
<http://www.landforgood.org>
Finding solutions that are good for farmers, landowners, communities and the land.
Land For Good (LFG) is a nonprofit tax-exempt organization offering education and assistance to owners and managers of working lands, entering farmers, and other land use decision-makers in the six New England states. Land for Good offers unique programs and services to keep New England’s working lands working.

- Assist in transfer, leasing and succession planning;
- Coordinate acquisition and protection of farmland;
- Conduct educational programs to increase awareness;
- Connect farmers to available farmland through Land Here! Program.

Lands Sake
<http://www.landssake.org>
Connecting people to the land.
Lands Sake combines ecologically-sound land management practices with hands-on environmental education to model how public open space can be used and enjoyed by the community. Lands Sake maintains and runs public lands owned by the Town of Weston. Key elements include:

- Manage public farm, forests, and open space owned by the Town of Weston, MA.
- Lease and manage Case Farm;
- Manage public forest for recreation, production and revenue;
- Offer land management assistance to private farm and forest landowners.

PCC Farmland Trust
www.pccfarmlandtrust.org
PCC Farmland Trust’s mission is to secure, preserve and steward threatened farmland in the Northwest, ensuring that generations of local farmers productively farm using sustainable, organic growing methods. By preserving land for organic farming, PCC Farmland Trust is not only safeguarding local organic farms and conserving wildlife habitat, but is also supporting the continued livelihood of local farmers and the farming community, and increasing the availability of local, fresh organic foods. Key elements include:

- Purchase of fee simple interest and conservation easements on organic farms in NW;
- Collaborate with other organizations to protect farmland;
- Connect farmers to conserved farmland;
- Require organic farm practices on all PCC Farmland Trust conserved farms

Vermont Land Trust
www.vlt.org
Protecting our family farms, forests and the places that are important to Vermont
Key elements include:

- Farmland Access Program connecting farmers to farmland;
- Farmland conservation – purchase, conserve and/or resale;
- Farm Viability Enhancement Program: Business support and assistance

Viva Farms
<http://vivafarms.blogspot.com>
Viva Farms, an incubator farm located in the Skagit Valley, WA, is a joint venture between WSU Extension and GrowFood.org, “an international nonprofit dedicated to recruiting, training and capitalizing the next generation of sustainable farmers.” Key elements include:

- incubator farm offering education and training for new farmers, including the Latino farm population;
- opportunity to lease land and equipment for farming;
- marketing and distribution support; and
- capitalization in the form of start-up loans.

Appendix 2
Goals, Issues, and Actions Survey

To identify priority goals and issues facing agriculture, the San Juan County Agricultural Strategic Plan Steering Committee gathered input on pressing issues from outreach meetings on each of the major islands as well as a retreat of the Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC). These issues were articulated in the form of Goals, Issues, and Actions, organized under the general categories of Land, People, and Economics. Participants were asked to rank their top five priorities,

Top Goals, Issues, and Actions
(A more detailed discussion of the top five goals and actions is presented in *Section Three: Recommendations*)

Farmland Preservation
Goal: Preserve farmland for farming
Issue: Increasing land values and shifting demographics in San Juan County have resulted in subdivision and conversion of farmland and historic farmland that is left fallow. Over the last 50 years, San Juan County has shifted from an agrarian economy to a tourist destination and vacation and retirement homes, resulting in real estate prices that reflect non-agricultural uses. Conservation organizations are challenged by the task of managing conserved farmland.

Regulatory
Goal: Adopt and promote scale-appropriate state and local regulations in order to foster farm businesses and support a thriving local farm economy.
Issue: The average size of a farm in San Juan County is 20 acres, and many federal, state and local regulations are not appropriate to the smaller scale of farming. Regulations that were written to apply to large-scale operations do not fit with the scale of farming in the islands, including processing, sales, and markets.

Farmers
Goal: Promote opportunities for new farmers to establish successful farms in San Juan County.
Issue: The average age of farmers in San Juan County is 61.8 years. There is a need for a new generation of farmers. New farmers usually start as interns on existing farms, and need access to land and capital in order to start their own operations.

Infrastructure & Inputs
Goal: Develop adequate access to infrastructure necessary to process and maintain diverse agricultural operations.
Issue: San Juan County does not have adequate infrastructure for processing and storage of agricultural products. Much of the infrastructure on historic farms is in disrepair. While there is a historic legacy of cooperative-based storage and processing facilities on several of the islands, there is little to no accessible or commonly-owned facilities. Furthermore, geographic isolation adds to the high costs of building infrastructure.

Marketing
Goal: Develop strong local and regional market opportunities in order to sustain and expand the local agricultural economy.
Issue: Local markets are limited mainly to farmers’ markets, restaurants, and some grocery stores. These venues do not provide adequate capacity for marketing of local products. Although there are clear indications of a strong regional market for local foods, it is both expensive and time consuming to transport local produce to regional markets.

Organizational Collaboration
Goal: Public and private collaboration and sufficient organizational capacity is essential to the success of sustainable farming in the San Juan Islands.
Issue: Although San Juan County has many organizations that support important aspects of agriculture, there are significant gaps that must be addressed to achieve meaningful success. Successful implementation of strategic actions would benefit from a formalized collaborative approach that brings together committed organizations with expertise in key elements in strengthening agriculture in San Juan County, including land conservation, sustainable land management, lease agreements, linking farmers to available farmland, business planning, financial support and loans, marketing, and education.

Other Goals, Issues, and Actions
The following goals, issues, and actions were also identified through outreach to stakeholders, but were not considered to be highest priority. These priorities are inter-related to other priorities and implementation will be considered at a future time.

Education
Goal: Support for growing a sustainable local food system will be strengthened through education and research.
Issue: There is inadequate political and public support for strengthening a sustainable local food system in San Juan County
Actions:

- Develop a comprehensive profile of agriculture in San Juan County through research and surveys to quantify and track trends in the agricultural sector, including crops, revenue, markets, acreage in production, and percentage of products locally consumed.
- Develop educational materials for distribution that clearly profile the unique strengths and benefits of a sustainable local farm economy.
- Coordinate with local schools to promote and expand the farm-to-school programs to advance increased awareness about local farming and the benefits of eating healthy local foods.
- Promote vocational training for high school students, including farm work, cooking with local foods, marketing, and other trades.
- Coordinate and promote Farm Education and Sustainability for Teens (FEAST) Program on all islands.

Outcomes:

- A comprehensive and current set of data on the economics of farming in San Juan County will be available.
- Vocational training opportunities related to agriculture will be available through high schools and the community college.
- Agriculture will be promoted to the general public as well as local schools.
- Farm-to-school programs on all the major islands will be well established and fully funded, providing healthy local foods for the students, and classes that connect students with farms and food production.

Housing
Goal: Farm owners and farm workers will have affordable housing options.
Issue: High real estate costs and expensive building costs, combined with seasonal vacation rentals, limit affordable farm housing.
Actions:

- Research feasibility of collaborative approach to build low cost housing for farm workers, perhaps through partnership with a community land trust seeking to provide training about green building practices.
- Research feasibility of community land trust model for farmland ownership and housing, keeping land and housing affordable for future farmers through innovative long-term leases. Research regulations to allow year-round housing for farm workers and to address farm succession and transfer.

- Outcomes:**
- Affordable housing will be available for farmers and farm workers.
 - Zoning and land use regulations will be modified to provide additional opportunities for farm worker housing.

Water

- Goal:** Farmers will have access to water for crop production and will be knowledgeable about water conservation measures.
- Issues:** Agriculture competes with residences and wildlife for scarce water resources, which are increasingly regulated.
- Actions:**
- Educate agricultural producers regarding water right acquisition, irrigation practices that reduce water use.
 - Promote research and development of crops that reduce water use, such as dryland farming practices.
 - Promote policies which result in wise and effective use of water, and which reserve sufficient water within agricultural zones for agricultural uses.
 - Collaborate with state agencies to demonstrate local grazing and cropland production without water pollution.

- Outcomes:**
- All farmers in San Juan County will have recognized water rights.
 - Water conservation practices will be utilized by all commercial farmers.

Soil

- Goal:** Maintain and enhance soil fertility and health in San Juan County.
- Issue:** The declining agricultural economy in San Juan County has resulted in decreased management of farmland to maintain or build soil fertility.
- Actions:**
- Promote education for farmers in best management practices for soil nutrient management, grazing, and tillage.
 - Research grant opportunities to fund demonstration farms showcasing innovative approaches and research for management practices appropriate for San Juan County soils.
 - Promote long-term lease of conservation lands that requires sustainable farm practices, including nutrient management and enhanced soil fertility.
 - Research feasibility of tax or other incentives that encourage best management practices, using organic matter and nutrients as metrics.
 - Promote research on innovative approaches for enhancing soil fertility while also addressing carbon sequestration and the economic feasibility.

- Outcomes:**
- Three demonstration farms will provide the locations for research, public education, and technical assistance in sustainable farm practices.
 - Public or private incentives will be established to reward farmers who maintain and enhance soil fertility.

Access to Capital

- Goal:** Access to capital is essential to the growth of San Juan County agriculture.
- Issue:** There is limited access to capital for start-up and continuing maintenance costs.
- Actions:**
- Research and propose public and/or private mechanisms to fund short and long term agricultural needs such as research, education, marketing, and financing.
 - Establish partnerships to provide microloans and revolving funds for farm operations.
 - Establish a local revolving fund for infrastructure on San Juan County Land Bank and San Juan Preservation Trust lands.
- Outcomes:**
- Farmers will have access to micro and revolving loans for start-up, maintenance, and new venture enterprises, for farm operations and for establishing infrastructure on publicly owned farmland.

Research

- Goal:** Support for growing a sustainable local food system will be strengthened through education and research.
- Issue:** Ongoing research is needed to identify niche crops and markets that optimize the unique characteristics of San Juan County soils, climate, and infrastructure, including transportation by ferry.
- Actions:**
- Collaborate with partner organizations such as Northwest Agriculture Business Center and Washington State University to promote funding and conduct research and development of niche crops and markets ideally suited to San Juan County.
 - Promote use of conserved farmlands for ongoing agricultural research to test new crops.
- Outcomes:**
- Economic opportunities will increase due to development of niche crops and markets.

Climate

- Goal:** Identify ways to adapt to and minimize the impacts of climate change to agriculture in San Juan County.
- Issue:** Projected impacts of climate change will likely affect agriculture due to changes in timing and duration of precipitation, seasonal temperatures, and increased opportunities for invasive species.
- Actions:**
- Develop methods to increase water storage for irrigation and to retain water in soil through increased organic matter.
 - Promote research on crops and production models that are adaptable to shifting climate patterns and potential impacts.
 - Promote research on sustainable methods for invasive weed control.
- Outcomes:**
- Local agricultural products and management practices will be developed to address impacts due to climate change.

Appendix 3
Mapping Priority Farmland for Preservation

Methodology

The San Juan County Strategic Plan Steering Committee, with representation from the Agricultural Resources Committee of San Juan County, San Juan Preservation Trust, WSU Extension Office of San Juan County, and San Juan County Land Bank, examined data from outreach displays at the San Juan County Fair and the Orcas and San Juan Farmers’ Markets. The Steering Committee then established a database of known active farms in the county, and added several parameters (see below). Subcommittees consisting of those knowledgeable about farms on each of the three major islands (Lopez, Orcas, and San Juan) then reviewed this database, adding, deleting, and revising the information. Several versions of maps were generated in the process, leading to the current set. It is anticipated that the database will be kept up to date with at least an annual review and revision.

Database and Maps

This process generated a database for all known actively farmed land in San Juan County. Data categories included: name of owner; name of farm; address; island; tax parcel number; actively farmed; owner operated or leased; producing for local market (food, hay or pasture; nursery); connected to other farmland; infrastructure; historic barn; activity (written description of farming); leasee (if any); phone; email; and comments. This, in turn, generated a series of maps of farmland in San Juan County. They were dependent upon several criteria:

- Actively Farmed—actively being used to produce food, fiber, and/or other agricultural products;
- Agriculture Current Use Taxation (AgCUT)—enrolled with the County Assessor in a current use taxation program with agricultural use;
- Agricultural Resource Land (ARL)—land zoned as agriculture in the SJC Comprehensive Plan; and
- Conserved Land—parcels that have either easements or are held in fee simple by either the San Juan Preservation Trust or the San Juan County Land Bank, or both.

In addition to a map for each of these four individual criteria, the following set of maps combined several criteria:

- Actively Farmed; AgCUT; ARL
- Actively Farmed; AgCUT; ARL; Conserved Land
- Farmed and Fallow Lands (according to 2009 survey)

Preliminary Findings

- 1.** For the most part, the three key parameters--Actively Farmed; AgCUT; ARL—largely overlap, which means that the county’s official land use designation, parcels enrolled under the tax program, and our assessment of currently farmed lands are all corroborative. When one adds the factor of conserved land, properties that have all four criteria form core farmland foci on each island.
- 2.** There are some places where all three criteria do not overlap. If we look at the three categories as a three-circle Venn diagram, then analyzing each of the areas of overlap (or not) yields significant findings.
- **Some ARL lands are in the AgCUT, but are currently not actively farmed (i.e., fallow);** this means that they were once farmed or had the potential for being farmed, and, despite the fact that they are in the tax program are not really being farmed today. This indicates a **potential threat** to loss of that farmland due to conversion for other uses.
 - **Some AgCUT lands are actively farmed, but not designated ARL;** this just means that they were not originally identified as agricultural resource lands at the time of the Comprehensive Plan, or are on smaller parcels designated Rural Farm Forest.



Blossom Organic Foods
Photo: J. Kvistad

- **Some ARL lands are currently farmed, but not in AgCUT;** owners of these parcels should be encouraged to apply for the taxation program as an incentive and commitment to keeping the land in commercial farming.
 - **Some lands are only actively farmed;** these may be smaller parcels or even ‘pocket farms’ that were never designated ARL and for whatever reason have not applied for the tax program.
 - **Some lands are only ARL;** this means that they qualified at the time of designation in the comprehensive planning process, but have since ceased farming; and
 - **Some lands are only in the Ag CUT;** this raises a serious issue of being in the tax program while not actually farming, and should be mitigated through transitional programs such as Farm and Agriculture Land Conservation.
- 3.** Given these basic categories, individual parcels can then be prioritized based on a further subset of threats:
- Subdivision potential—how much the parcel can be subdivided based on zoning?
 - Not actively farmed—does this make the parcel subject to the pressure of development or other non-agricultural use?
 - Not AgCUT—without substantial tax incentives, does this make the parcel subject to the pressure of development or other non-agricultural use?
 - Not ARL—this seems less of a threat, in that it may very well be actively farmed on a smaller parcel that was not originally recognized as agricultural resource land.
 - Not connected to other farmland (isolated)—without being connected to similar parcels, an isolated farm is more likely to be converted or not conserved as farmland.
 - Water (or view) property—waterfront is prime real estate property, whose ‘highest and best use’ tends away from farming and toward single family residential. Higher property taxes cause further threat.
 - Ownership of larger farm by older generation farm family, and potential transfer to multiple family members — transfer of ownership from one generation to the next within a family often results in subdivision for individual family members and may contribute to conversion or sale of land.

4. Looked at from a “farmshed” point of view, there are groupings of land within the island landscapes that have been historically farmed and are still being farmed; Conservation of active farmland within priority farmsheds are priorities for preservation.
5. It is important to note also what we observed early on in the process of mapping, that there are two general types of farming going on in San Juan County right now:
- Large, historically farmed parcels that are currently used for hay or pasture; and
 - Small, more intensively farmed parcels that produce market vegetables and niche products.
6. Finally, it is important to note that the financial benchmarks for earnings to qualify for AgCUT vary according to the size of the parcels, with smaller parcels having a higher proportional benchmark than larger parcels over 20 acres.

Appendix 4
Conservation Tools For Protecting Farmland

Conservation organizations use a number of approaches to conserve important lands. The approach is based on a consideration of various factors, including determination of the conservation values of the land and whether these meet the conservation priorities established by the organization; the personal and financial goals of the landowner; availability of funding; and the current and future uses of the land. The most commonly used methods are through the purchase or donation of a conservation easement, or through the purchase or donation of the fee simple interest in the land.

Conservation easements: A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization, such as San Juan Preservation Trust or a government agency such as the San Juan County Land Bank. The conservation easement permanently restricts certain rights in order to protect the conservation values of the property. A conservation easement may be donated or sold by a landowner wishing to protect their land. After placing a conservation easement on land, the landowner maintains ownership and use of the property and can sell it or pass it on to heirs. The conservation easement legally restricts certain uses on a property as a means to protect the conservation values of that land. The restrictions of the conservation easement are maintained in perpetuity. For example, a conservation easement on farmland may restrict development rights, subdivision, or placement of buildings as a means to protect ongoing agricultural use of the land. Conservation easements have become one of the most commonly used land conservation tools in the country. The conservation easement is structured to achieve the goals of the landowner and to protect the conservation values of the land. The property remains in private ownership and can be used, sold or bequeathed. The conservation organization that holds the conservation easement assumes legal obligations to ensure that the terms of the easement are achieved forever.

Tax advantages of conservation easements: There are potential tax advantages to granting a conservation easement. A conservation easement donation that meets certain federal tax code regulations can qualify as a tax-deductible charitable gift (*see Internal Revenue Code Section 170(h)(1)*), resulting in a potential income tax deduction or an estate tax benefit. By removing or decreasing a property’s development potential, a conservation easement may also result in the reduction of property taxes in some states and estate tax benefits of the landowner and his or her heirs. (Landowners should consult a tax attorney or refer to the publications listed below for more information on the potential tax benefits of donating a conservation easement.) A conservation-minded owner may wish to allow development on a portion of the land

Case Study: Clark Farm, Orcas Island
Protected by San Juan Preservation Trust, 2005



Crow Valley Photo: San Juan Preservation Trust

Located in the heart of pastoral Crow Valley on Orcas Island, 322-acre JB Farm is the largest working farm on the island. The farm’s beautiful mosaic of farmland, habitat, and forest has provided expansive pastoral views for generations of islanders. Faced with continued invitations to subdivide and develop the land, the Clark family made the decision to protect it forever through a sale of a conservation easement to San Juan Preservation Trust. Through a generous bargain sale by the family, the large farm will be forever protected for future agricultural uses. By placing a conservation easement on the property, the owners can continue to farm as they always have, while at the same time restricting future development and protecting important conservation values on the property. Under the terms of the conservation easement, a total of 2 carefully-sited residences will be allowed.

while protecting the most significant portion for conservation purposes. This may include protecting a portion for ongoing agricultural uses or as wildlife habitat. This type of transaction of donation of a portion in fee can maximize both the tax benefits and the value of the remaining property.

Sale of land for conservation purposes: The sale of land, or an interest in the land, may be the most appropriate approach for owners of high priority conservation lands who are unable or unwilling to donate their land. The property may be sold at fair market value or for a bargain sale at a price that is below fair market value. A bargain sale to a qualified conservation organization may result in charitable tax benefits for the landowner.

Donation of land for conservation purposes: A landowner can give the land for conservation purposes through an outright donation, or through a remainder interest or a bequest in a will. If a landowner is interested in donating an easement or land through his or her will, he or she should discuss his or her plans with the recipient organization to ensure that the organization is willing and able to accept the donation.

Appendix 5
San Juan County Agricultural Taxation Programs

Agricultural Current Use Taxation Program
The Open Space Taxation Act (RCW 84.34), enacted by the Washington State legislature in 1970, allows property owners to have their open space, agricultural, and timber lands valued at their current use rather than at their highest and best use. These programs support the public benefit of encouraging and supporting ongoing commercial use of our resource lands as well as protection of key habitat and open space features. (The “Open Space Law” Chapter 84.34 RCW and Chapter 458-30 WAC)

- Farm and Agricultural land is defined as either:
1. Any parcel of land that is twenty or more acres or multiple parcels of land that are contiguous and total twenty or more acres:
 - Devoted primarily to the production of livestock or agricultural commodities for commercial purposes
 - Enrolled in a cropland retirement program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture
 2. Any parcel of land that is five acres or more but less than twenty acres devoted primarily to agricultural uses equivalent to:
 - One hundred dollars or more per acre per year for three of the five calendar years preceding the date of application for classification made prior to January 1, 1993 and
 - On or after January 1, 1993, two hundred dollars or more per acre per year for three of the five calendar years preceding the date of application for classification
 3. Any parcel of land of less than five acres devoted primarily to agricultural uses which has produced a gross income of:
 - One thousand dollars or more per year for three of the five calendar years preceding the date of application made prior to January 1, 1993 and
 - On or after January 1, 1993, fifteen hundred dollars or more per year for three of the five calendar years preceding the date of application for classification.
 4. “Farm and agricultural land” also includes:
 - Incidental uses compatible with agricultural purposes provided such use does not exceed twenty percent of the classified land
 - Land on which appurtenances necessary for production, preparation, or sale of agricultural products exist in conjunction with the lands producing such products
 - Any noncontiguous parcel one to five acres, that is an integral part of the farming operations
 - Land on which housing for employees and principal place of residence of the farm operation or owner is sited provided the use of the housing or residence is integral to the use of the classified land for agricultural purposes and provided that the classified parcel is twenty or more acres

Farm and Agriculture Conservation Land Program
In 2011, San Juan County Council adopted the Farm and Agriculture Conservation Land (FACL) Program, which is incorporated into the county’s Public Benefit Rating System (PBRS). The FACL program offers reduced property taxes for lands that may not be eligible for AgCUT, but that are being maintained for future commercial agricultural use.

SJCC Chapter 16.50.265 Farm and agricultural conservation land.
A. Objectives. The objective of the farm and agricultural conservation land component of the open space program is to preserve suitable land that is not currently used for agriculture, so that it is available for commercial agriculture in the future. The intention is that farm and agricultural conservation land either be returned to active farming under RCW 84.34.020(2) within 10 years or be permanently protected as an open space resource by

a conservation easement prohibiting development inconsistent with agricultural uses.

B. To be eligible for public benefit points under this subsection a property must meet all of the following criteria:

1. Properties must meet the definition of “farm and agricultural conservation land” as defined in RCW 84.34.020(8);

2. Properties must be “subdividable,” that is, the area of each subject property must be equal to or greater than two times the maximum residential density of the underlying zoning district. This requirement does not apply to property designated as “resource land” in the Comprehensive Plan; and

3. Applications must be accompanied by a statement of intent, which includes all interim measures that will be followed to protect and manage the land in a manner that allows resumption of commercial agricultural use. The statement shall provide the following information:

a. The tax parcel number of the subject property;

b. The size of the subject property;

c. The historical use of the property for farming;

d. A nontechnical soils description and a listing as a prime or other important agricultural soil as assigned in the most recent San Juan County Soil Survey, published online by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and available online at: <http://soildatamart.nrcs.usda.gov/manuscripts/wa055/0/SanJuanWA.pdf>;

e. A map of the property showing improvements and areas to be maintained as farm land under this program;

f. A description of existing vegetation including the presence of noxious weeds;

g. A copy of the published soils map showing the boundaries of the subject property;

h. A schedule of measures that are and will be used to accomplish the goals and purposes of this chapter, including a commitment to prevent the encroachment of noxious plant species onto the open space land; and the objectives of this section of the County code;

i. The measures to be taken to maintain the agricultural character of the open space lands, such as maintenance of existing fences, farm buildings and periodic mowing of pastures and hayfields.

Appendix 6

Scope and Process of Washington State Office of Farmland Preservation Grant

As stated in the grant application to Washington State Office of Farmland Preservation, the goal of the San Juan County Agricultural Strategic Plan is to identify key goals and strategies that will result in the preservation of priority farmland and strategic actions to strengthen a viable agricultural sector in San Juan County. The grant was submitted by Agricultural Resources Committee, San Juan Preservation Trust and SJC Land Bank. The following generally describes the scope of the grant.

- 1) Identification of priority farmland conservation areas based on public input, identification of key criteria, and mapping analysis.
- 2) Identification of priority goals and actions to promote and strengthen a sustainable agricultural economy
- 3) Research and discussion of collaborative models for linking new and established farmers to farm sustainably on conserved farmland, encouraging innovative approaches that provide public benefit through local foods for institutions, education and increased soil fertility.

Process

The following steps have been taken in preparing an agricultural strategic plan for San Juan County:

1) Compilation and analysis of public input regarding conservation priorities, including data from San Juan Preservation Trust and San Juan County Land Bank.

a) Outreach was held at SJC Fair, August 18-21, 2010; Orcas Farmers’ Market, September 11, 2010; and San Juan Farmers’ Market, September 18, 2010.

b) Outreach meetings were held on Lopez Island (December 1, 2010), Orcas Island (December 3, 2010), San Juan Island (March 24, 2011) and Waldron Island (March 31, 2011). The goal of the outreach meetings was to hear from island farmers and other stakeholders about challenges facing agriculture in SJC today and to identify priorities for agriculture in the future.

c) A half day retreat was held on December 8, 2010 including members of the Agricultural Resources Committee and other key stakeholders. The meeting objective was “to identify short and long term priorities and strategic actions for promoting and maintaining sustainable agriculture in San Juan County.” Feedback from that meeting was compiled and analyzed.

d) The steering committee met to synthesize the material from the outreach meetings and the retreat and then incorporate it into the strategic plan.

2) Develop criteria for identifying priorities.

a) A draft set of farmland preservation criteria included: enrollment in Agriculture Current Use Taxation program; actively farmed; farmer owned; producing for local markets; connected to other active or conserved farmland; existing infrastructure (farm buildings, fences, ponds, etc), and presence of historic barns or other farm structures.

3) Using GIS analysis, maps highlighting priority areas for conservation and including a preliminary list of priority lands was compiled.

a) A database of all the farms in the county was compiled, including information representing each of the identified criteria.

4) GIS analysis highlighted all farms that are

- 1) designated as Agricultural Resource Lands,
 - 2) currently being actively farmed, and
 - 3) enrolled in Agriculture Current Use Taxation program.
- Additional criteria were applied to further define priorities.

5) Review and input by San Juan County Agricultural Strategic Action Plan Steering Committee.

a) The Strategic Action Plan Steering Committee, representing the Agricultural Resources Committee, WSU Extension, San Juan Preservation Trust, and SJC Land Bank, met regularly to review materials, evaluate progress, and provide input on strategies and priorities.

6) A Draft Strategic Action Plan was distributed to stakeholders for review;

7) The Final Strategic Action Plan was completed for distribution to San Juan County Council, San Juan County Land Bank, the Agricultural Resource Committee members, San Juan Preservation Trust, and other key stakeholders and organizations.

Appendix 7

Lead Organizations

San Juan County Agricultural Resources Committee (www.sjcarc.org).

In 2005, in recognition of the importance of protecting and restoring farmland, the San Juan County Council established the Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC). The ARC is comprised of up to 15 citizen members, at least 50% of whom are commercial farmers. The ARC provides policy guidance to the San Juan County Council on agricultural issues, trends, and opportunities, and works to strengthen and advance agriculture through support for economic development, farmland preservation, and regulatory reform. Development of a countywide agricultural strategic plan was identified as a priority in the ARC’s 2010 Workplan, approved by San Juan County Council in March 2010.

San Juan Preservation Trust (www.sjpt.org). The San Juan Preservation Trust, the first non-profit land trust in Washington, opened its doors in 1979. Its mission is “to preserve and protect open spaces, scenic views, forests, agricultural lands, habitats, watersheds, riparian corridors, wetlands, and shorelines in the San Juan Archipelago.” To date the Trust has 12,792 acres in easements and 1,473 acres in preserves. It is interesting to note that the majority of conserved farmland in San Juan County has been protected by the Trust through conservation easements donated by landowners.

San Juan County Land Bank (www.sjclandbank.org). In 1990, San Juan County residents voted to impose a real estate excise tax on property sales to fund the preservation of land by the San Juan County Land Bank, the only public organization of its kind in the state. The mission of the Land Bank is “to preserve in perpetuity areas in the county that have environmental, agricultural, aesthetic, cultural, scientific, historic, scenic, or low-intensity recreational value.” Currently, the Land Bank has 2,079 acres under easements and 3,580 acres in preserves.

Case Study: King Sisters & Frazer Homestead Farms, San Juan Island

Protected by San Juan County Land Bank, 2005 and 2006



Spring lambs! Photo: San Juan County Land Bank

From 2003 to 2009, San Juan County Land Bank made several important purchases of farmland on San Juan Island, reflecting their mandate to preserve in perpetuity lands that have agricultural significance.

King Sisters Property: In 2005, the Land Bank purchased 66 acres of pastureland from the King sisters—Maggie, Phoebe, Mary Jean and Janet—whose family has owned the land for over 60 years. The scenic views across rolling pasture and woodlands of pastoral San Juan Valley have long been enjoyed by travelers along San Juan Valley Road. Following purchase of the land and in the interest of utilizing it for active agriculture, the Land Bank developed the infrastructure necessary for active use, and has leased it to local farmers who are raising sheep, berries, and hay.

Frazer Homestead Preserve: In 2006, the Land Bank conserved approximately 68 acres located on the east side of Cattle Point Road, as part of the gateway to American Camp National Historic Park. Frazer Homestead includes open agricultural lands and provides a trail link between adjacent American Camp and areas to the north. As with King Sisters, the land has been leased to a local farmer.

Appendix 8

Farm and Agricultural Organizations in San Juan County and Washington State

Agricultural Resources Council of San Juan County (ARC)
Purpose: To advocate for the protection and restoration of agricultural resources in San Juan County. **Focus:** Advocacy, education, coordination, program development. www.sjcarc.org

Food For Thought Program, San Juan Island School District
Purpose: To provide local and regional food to school cafeteria.
Focus: Farm to School

Island Grown Farmers Cooperative (IGFC)
Purpose: To provide USDA-inspected mobile animal slaughter services in San Juan, Whatcom, Skagit, Island and Snohomish counties in WA State.
Focus: Marketing and on-farm mobile slaughter services. www.igfcmeats.com

Lopez Community Land Trust (LCLT)
Purpose: To build a diverse, sustainable Lopez Island community through affordable housing, sustainable agriculture, and other dynamic rural development programs. **Focus:** Development of affordable housing, promotion of sustainable agriculture and energy. www.lopezclt.org

Lopez Island Farmers’ Market (Lopez FM)
Purpose: To provide a venue for marketing of local farm products.
Focus: Marketing. www.lopezfarmersmarket.com

Lopez Island Farm Education Farm to School Program (LIFE)
Purpose: To grow local food for Lopez school; to educate students about farming and growing food. **Focus:** Farm to School.
www.farmtoschool.org/WA/programs

Lopez Locavores
Purpose: To promote affordable access to fresh, whole, locally and sustainably grown food. **Focus:** Support, education, advocacy.
www.lopezlocavores.org

Northwest Agriculture Business Center (NABC)
Purpose: To provide NW Washington farmers with the skills and the resources required to profitably and efficiently supply their products to consumers, retailers, wholesalers, foodservice operators and food manufacturers.
Focus: Marketing, business support, education. www.agbizcenter.org

Orcas Island Farmers Market (Orcas FM)
Purpose: To provide a venue for marketing of local farm products.
Focus: Marketing. www.orcasislandfarmersmarket.org

The Orcas Island Farm to Cafeteria Program
Purpose: To provide local food for the Orcas Island School cafeteria and to educate students about farming and growing local food. **Focus:** Farm to School education. www.orcasislandf2c.org

San Juan County Land Bank (SJCLB)
Purpose: To preserve in perpetuity areas in the county that have environmental, agricultural, aesthetic, cultural, scientific, historic, scenic or low-intensity recreational value and to protect existing and future sources of potable water.
Focus: Land Conservation. www.sjclandbank.org

San Juan Farmers’ Market (San Juan FM)
Purpose: To provide a venue for marketing of local farm products.
Focus: Marketing. www.sjifarmersmarket.com

Slow Food Land & Sea
Purpose: To support and advocate for clean, fair, healthy food and sustainable agriculture, with an emphasis on directly supporting our local farmers and producers. **Focus:** Support. www.slowfoodlandandsea.blogspot.com

San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild (SJI Ag Guild)
Purpose: To foster a vibrant and sustainable local food system in San Juan County, WA through technical and financial support to the agricultural community, consumer education, and advocacy on behalf of consumers and agricultural producers. **Focus:** Marketing, technical support, advocacy, education. www.sjiagguild.com

San Juan Islands Conversation District (SJI CD)
Purpose: To protect and enhance the natural resources of San Juan County ecosystems for the future of us all. **Focus:** Conservation & management of farmland, education, technical assistance. www.sanjuanislandscd.org

San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau (SJI VB)
Purpose: To enhance the economic prosperity of San Juan County by promoting year-round tourism, while respecting and sustaining the Islands’ unique and diverse ecosystems, environments, lifestyles and cultures. **Focus:** Marketing, outreach, economic development. www.visitsanjuans.com

San Juan Preservation Trust (SJPT)
Purpose: To preserve and protect open spaces, scenic views, forests, agricultural lands, habitats, watersheds, riparian corridors, wetlands and shorelines in the San Juan Archipelago. **Focus:** Land Conservation.
www.sjpt.org

Skagit-Island-San Juan USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)
Purpose: Provides advice on conservation, disaster assistance, price support, and farm loans. **Focus:** Support. www.fsa.usda.gov

Sustainable Orcas (SOI)
Purpose: Interest in sustainability, being green, and working together as a community. **Focus:** Advocacy, education. wiki.sustainableorcasisland.org

WA State Conservation Commission Office of Farmland Preservation (WA OFP)
Purpose: To promote the vitality of farming, farmers, and ranchers by ensuring that we will continue to have productive agricultural lands in Washington State. **Focus:** Land conservation, funding, advocacy, policy support.
www.ofp.scc.wa.gov

WA State University—Extension SJC (WSU Ext)
Purpose: To promote lifelong learning, self-sufficiency, and a livable environment by providing research-based education to individuals, families, and diverse communities. **Focus:** Education, outreach, support.
www.sanjuan.wsu.edu



Submitted by **Agricultural Resources Committee of San Juan County**
San Juan Preservation Trust
San Juan County Land Bank