



During the 2009 session, the legislature expanded the FPP eligibility requirement<sup>1</sup> to allow non-profit organizations and the Conservation Commission to apply for FPP grants. In light of that change, staff suggests that the role of third parties in preserving farmlands may need to be considered.

The Washington State Conservation Commission's Office of Farmland Preservation is interested in participating in the evaluation of these policies and other issues. In December 2008, the Farmland Preservation Task Force recommended that the Conservation Commission work with RCO to revise FPP ranking criteria. The Task Force was established by the legislature to provide guidance to the Office of Farmland Preservation on conservation easements and major factors leading to past declines of agricultural lands in Washington State.

RCO has requested guidance from the Conservation Commission, conservation districts, and county representatives about how FPP policies can fit with a statewide farmland preservation strategy, which is currently undeveloped. RCO's director meet with the Conservation Commission and indicated that once they completed their work on a statewide farmland preservation strategy, we would recommend to the board how that strategy could be incorporated into our FPP criteria. Until a statewide strategy is identified, staff will rely on input from stakeholders to shape program policies.

During the 2009 session, the legislature also amended the definition of "farm and agricultural land"<sup>2</sup> to include specific standing crops such as short-rotation hardwoods and Christmas trees. This change will need to be incorporated into the FPP policies as appropriate.

## Analysis

Staff will work with stakeholders in examining FPP goals, objectives and outcomes to assess the progress of the program. Staff will explore the following policy questions:

- Can RCO improve its outreach efforts to increase local participation in the program?
- What is the geographic distribution of FPP funds and, if unbalanced, what are the contributing factors?
- What is the role of third parties now that nonprofit organizations and the Conservation Commission are eligible for FPP grants?
- Could the evaluation criteria better meet the intent of the program?
- How well is the perpetual conservation easement working?
- What can be done to make the program more successful?

Program review updates will be presented to the board later this year. If recommendations to improve the program are ready, the staff will present those to the Board in September or November.

In addition, staff will draft a proposal for updating FPP eligibility policies to include the new definition of "farm and agricultural land" and to allow nonprofit organizations and the Conservation Commission to apply for FPP grants. These eligibility changes should be made before the next WWRP grant cycle.

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<sup>1</sup> SHB 1957

<sup>2</sup> EHB 1815

### **Next Steps**

Staff will work with key constituents such as the RCO's Farmland Preservation Program Advisory Committee, county representatives, land trusts and the Conservation Commission to review the FPP and to develop options for improvement. Program review updates will be presented to the board later this year. If recommendations to improve the program are ready, the staff will present those to the Board in September or November.

Staff will also draft proposals to revise eligibility policies to comply with the recent statutory changes. In order to make necessary changes by the next WWRP grant cycle, these proposals will be presented to the board in September and November of this year.