



Clark County Agricultural Preservation Advisory Committee (APAC)

## **Open Houses and Survey**

### **Summary Report and Public Comments**



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## Public Information and Outreach

Clark County Public Information and Outreach staff (PIO) distributed press releases to the local media, and published open house advertisements in the *Columbian*, the *Reflector* and the *Camas-Washougal Post Record*. The PIO also developed a webpage as part of the County's website at <http://www.clark.wa.gov/legacylands/projects.html#farm>. The page included information about the Farm Preservation effort, a copy of the draft report, a schedule of the open houses, and a link to an online survey questionnaire.

Flyers and postcards were distributed to APAC members who posted them at their places of employment, and shared them with friends, colleagues and neighbors.

Newspaper articles appeared in the *Camas-Washougal Post Record* on October 28 and *Reflector* on November 5, advertising the open houses scheduled for November 10 and 12, and in the *Columbian* on November 12, advertising the open house on that evening.

Special presentations were also made at a Washington State University-Vancouver class on Monday, November 17 and on Tuesday, November 18 at the Public Health Advisory Council.

A future presentation at the 2009 Clark County Fair was requested by the Chair of the Clark County Fair Board.

## Open Houses Overview

The Clark County Agricultural Preservation Advisory Committee (APAC) held three Open Houses to provide information to interested citizens about the Farmlands Preservations efforts in Clark County and to present key elements of the draft *Farm Preservation Strategies Report*. The Open Houses were an opportunity for farmers and concerned parties to provide feedback on proposed strategies.

### Open Houses Location and Dates

The Open Houses were held at various locations throughout Clark County in order to attract a broad representation of citizens. Each open house was held from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

Wednesday, November 5  
Camas Public Library, Camas

Monday, November 10  
CASEE Center, Brush Prairie

Wednesday, November 12  
Clark County Public Safety Complex, Ridgefield

## **Participant Attendance**

Each Open House was attended by community members and APAC members. Approximately three to four APAC members were available at each Open House to answer questions from participants. Public attendance at the Open Houses totaled sixty two (62) based on the sign-in sheets. Only two (2) community members attended the first Open House, thirty two (32) attended the second, and twenty eight (28) attended the third Open House.

## **Open House Format**

The Open Houses were informal drop-in style events. Participants visited various stations which provided more information about the *Farm Preservation Strategies Report*.

Each Open House included the following stations:

### **Sign-in Station**

Open House attendees signed in with their contact information, and obtained copies of the *Draft Farm Preservation Strategies Report Executive Summary*. The station also included comment cards which participants could fill out to provide their feedback.

### **Draft Map of Agricultural Areas**

Clark County provided a map of the county with agricultural lands highlighted. Participants were asked to find their farms or agricultural land on the map, and to mark their land if it was not highlighted.

### **Presentation Boards**

Clark County provided 9 informational boards, which presented the seven challenges identified in the *Farm Preservation Strategies Report*, and a highlight of the proposals to address these challenges. Alongside these presentation boards were flipcharts where participants could comment on any aspect of the challenges or proposals presented.

### **Land Use Map**

Clark County provided an agriculture zoning and current use map for participants to review.

In addition to these stations, Patrick Lee, Clark County Legacy Lands Program Manager, gave a presentation at the CASEE and Public Safety Complex Open Houses (an informal discussion was held with the two attendees at the Camas Open House). His presentation reviewed the main elements of the Strategies Report, agriculture challenges in the Clark County area, and proposed strategies and solutions. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions during and after the presentation.

## **Draft Map of Agricultural Areas: Lessons Learned**

Mapping exercises utilizing the draft map of agricultural areas during the Open Houses provided important insight into the use of agricultural areas in Clark County. Through discussions with the public over their particular agricultural practices, APAC learned the following:

- Clark County holds very few large, solid agricultural areas that are not fragmented by some other type of use.
- Many plots of land are zoned and/or being used for agricultural purposes. However, it is unknown what is being held for non-agricultural development.
- The draft map of agricultural areas in Clark County does have a basic shape that validates the County's current use map.

# Public Comments

Community members were given the opportunity to provide public comments through various means, including:

- Writing comments on flipcharts at all three Open Houses
- Filling out comment cards available at Open Houses
- Participating in Q&A after the Open House presentation
- Completing the online survey.

Several comment cards were collected and many participants wrote comments on flip charts, but the majority of comments included here were collected in the online survey, which 134 community members completed. A copy of all comments collected is available as an attachment to this document.

General themes heard in public comments collected include:

## **Development Rights**

*Sample response:*

“Purchase of development rights is a sound policy and a fair way to preserve high value lands for low value uses like agriculture and forestry. *Transfer* of development rights does not work. However, a more long term strategic approach needs to be paired with funding a ‘purchase of development rights’ program. Alone, it runs a risk of being a piecemeal and potentially panic response.”

## **Taxes and Other Incentives**

*Sample response:*

“Incentives that support small farms should be strengthened over those that support large, industrial farms that are mono-cropped and do not take into account biodiversity. There should be incentives for organic farming and integrated ecosystem safeguards (erosion control, riparian preservation, on-site biological diversity, etc) and for farmers who produce a diversified mix of products for local markets, not commodity farmers (corn, soy, etc.) who already benefit from excessive federal subsidies.

Farmland should be given dramatic tax reduction and incentives because it serves all of the population, including wildlife. “

## **Clark County Farm Fresh Logo**

*Sample response:*

“People are disconnected from their communities, but drawing these connections for people through a logo and a certain amount of outreach will naturally bring support and focus to the farm down the road. I really like the idea of branding of local foods, it offers the public a sense of marketing they can latch onto, and be proud of! I believe it will stimulate and generate

interest in farms and increase the appreciation of farmers and agriculture and the natural world in general.”

### **Farmers Markets**

*Sample response:*

“Year round farmers markets create a lively sense of community. However, these markets are not that profitable; they are more a tool to showcase products but not to sell at the market itself. A more profitable method would be for local farmers to band together and sell their products to local stores, or even to local schools.”

### **Commercial use of agricultural land**

*Sample response:*

“Commercial uses should only be allowed on farm land if they directly support farm uses. Running an excavation or landscaping company from farm land should not be permitted. It would be better to locate farmer's markets and other farm related commercial uses at specific rural commercial nodes rather than on individual farms. Farmer co-ops would be useful. Food production should be preferred over nursery production that produces decorative ornamentals or Christmas trees.”

### **Urban Growth**

*Sample response:*

“We MUST have a firm urban growth boundary in Clark County that does not expand every year or so. It should be firm, and it must encourage higher-density residential development within the boundary. Zoning codes/laws should be adjusted to facilitate this. Development must be contained within Urban Growth Boundaries, and paving over farmland for paths and walkways should be decreased; farmland should be used as farmland and saved at all costs. A good amount of very fertile land is located within the urban growth boundary. Low-impact farming techniques could be used in developed and developing rural and urban areas. Current regulation should encourage and not discourage farming.

When there is a conflict in development of some city/county related activity such as road building, trail building, etc., the farm should take precedence. Keeping fertile land as agricultural land should be a priority; roads and parking lots should be built on marginal lands that aren't being used as a rich biosphere to produce healthy food.”

### **Buffer Zones vs. integration between urban and farm areas**

*Sample response:*

“Buffer zones between farms and urban uses are important; they could even be a mix of accessible green space, community garden/compost areas, orchards, or intentionally planted areas that would be pleasant for residents to see and provide habitat for agriculturally beneficial fauna. At the same time, efforts should be made to integrate more farming into the urban areas. We need to also focus on bringing urban and rural communities together. Some other communities have done “know your farmer” campaigns, so urban folks know why it is important to support farming and value our community farmers.

Small farms should be able to operate near urban areas. Within urban areas, we need to preserve the right to garden and raise poultry.”

### **Organic and small farms vs. commercial farms**

*Sample response:*

“Efforts should be made to ensure the use of the most up-to-date farming methods, organic and biodynamic farming, and learning how to grow new, diverse crops with less energy use and traditional pesticides and fertilizers. Sustainable poly-crop agriculture that builds soil, protects the soil food web, avoids sprays and artificial fertilizers, efficiently manages rainwater, prevents nutrient runoff to streams, and creates a vibrant system that will perpetuate for future generations without degradation and should be preferred over degrading farm practices.

Sustainable farming needs to replace conventional farming practices which have only resulted in water pollution, soil erosion, wildlife destruction, soil sterilization, aquifer depletion, etc.”

### **Small farmers and over-regulation**

*Sample response:*

“Small farmers have to deal with too many codes. Help refine regulations to make the sale of meat, dairy and eggs easier for small-scale farmers. Over-regulation of small farms is a persistent and problematic situation. Small farms have difficulty in being profitable with restrictions on baking without a professional kitchen, and selling meat, eggs or dairy products without extensive permit processes. There should be a differentiation between regulations in place for large scale producers, and those in place for small farms, micro-dairies, and micro-egg or meat production.”

### **County Farm Link Program**

*Sample response:*

“The County Farm Link Program is a great idea, and when partnering retiring farmers with new farmers, this should include 'traditional' non-chemically dependent methodologies.”

### **Cost**

*Sample response:*

“Many of these are great ideas, but who will pay for it all?”

## Online Survey: Preserving Farms in Clark County

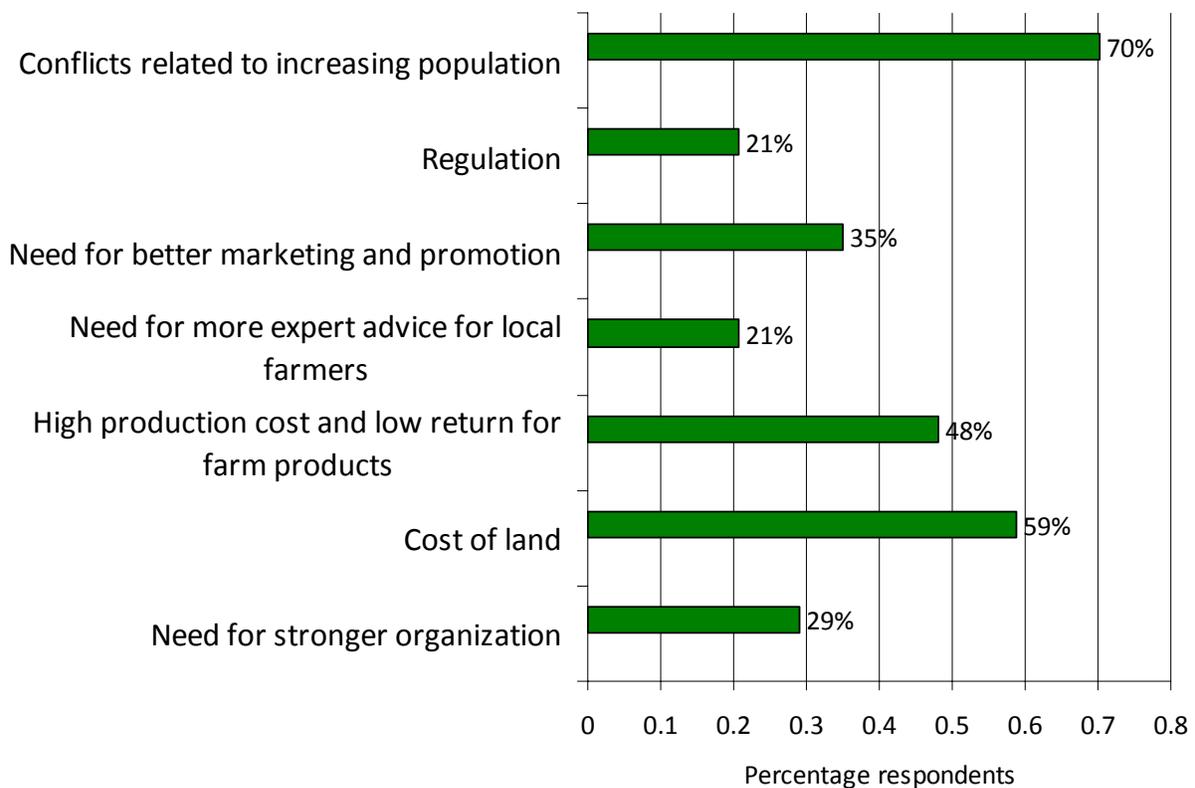
Participants were invited to complete an online survey. The survey period was open between Monday, November 3 and Monday, November 17, 2008. A Total of 134 people completed the survey. The following is a summary of the results.

*NOTE: The viewpoints expressed within the survey are not a statistically valid cross section of the Clark County population. They only represent the opinions of the small spectrum of residents that chose to complete the survey.*

### Priorities in Challenges to Agriculture

Respondents were given a list of the seven challenges to agriculture in Clark County, as highlighted by APAC. Respondents indicated what they believed to be the top three challenges to address.

Seventy percent (70%) of respondents chose conflicts related to increasing population as a top priority, followed by cost of land at fifty nine percent (59%). The lowest rated challenges were need for more expert advice for local farmers and regulation, both with twenty one percent (21%).

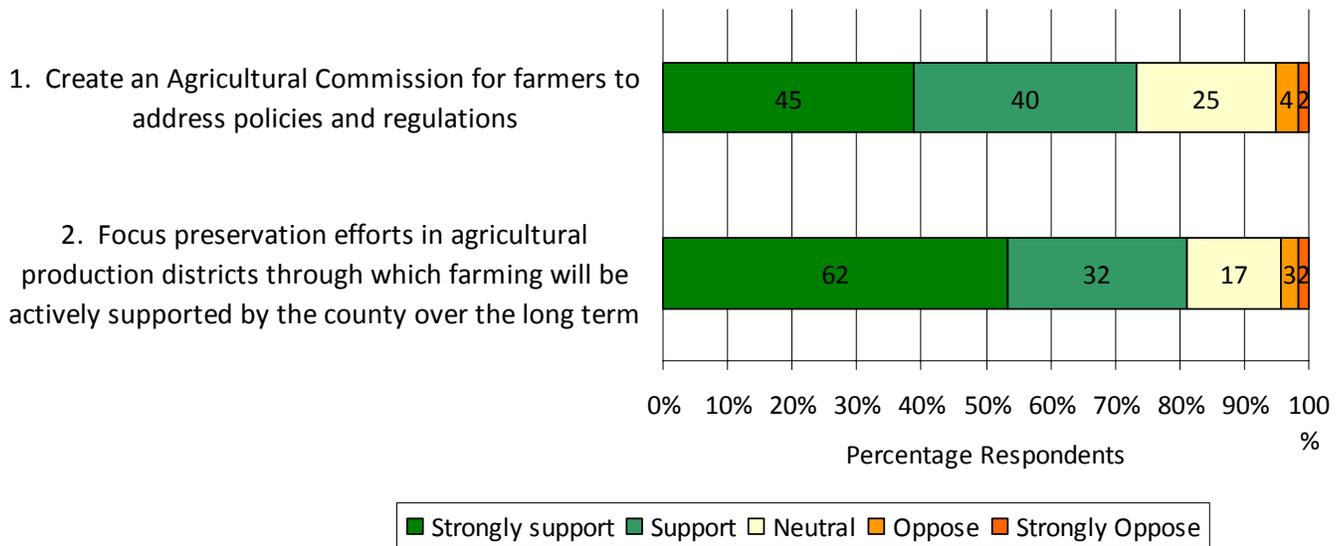


### Challenge# 1: Need for Stronger Organization

Respondents indicated whether they support or oppose the two strategies indicated in the *Farm Preservation Strategies Report* to deal with a need for stronger organization.

Over fifty percent (50%) of respondents (62 people) indicated that they strongly support the strategy to focus preservation efforts in agricultural production districts through which farming will be actively supported by the county over the long term. Very few people opposed either strategy.

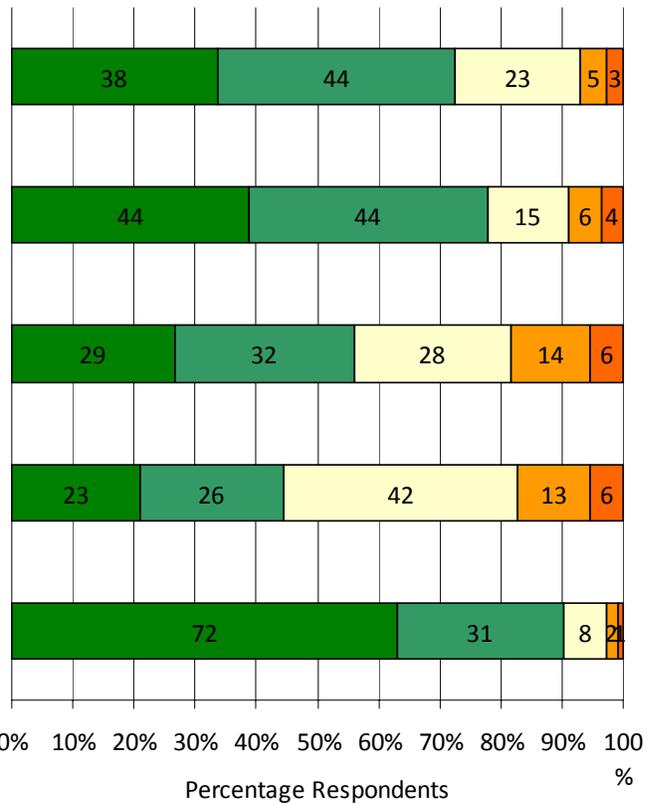
### Challenge # 2: Cost of land



Respondents indicated whether they support or oppose the five strategies indicated in the *Farm Preservation Strategies Report* to deal with the cost of land.

Over sixty percent (60%) of respondents (72 people) strongly supported the proposed strategy to develop a County Farm Link Program to match retiring farmers with current or new farmers to keep agricultural land in production. The strategies with the least support were purchasing the rights to develop farmlands for non-agricultural uses, and putting priority on funding a “purchase of development rights” program.

1. Create lease-back programs so that farmers could lease county-owned land
2. Use clustering, transfer of development rights, and density bonuses to encourage landowners to keep their lands in agricultural use.
3. Purchase the rights to develop farmlands for non-agricultural uses. Place easements on the lands to ensure they are available for agriculture.
4. Put priority on funding a "purchase of development rights" program
5. Develop a County Farm Link Program to match retiring farmers with current or new farmers to keep agricultural land in production

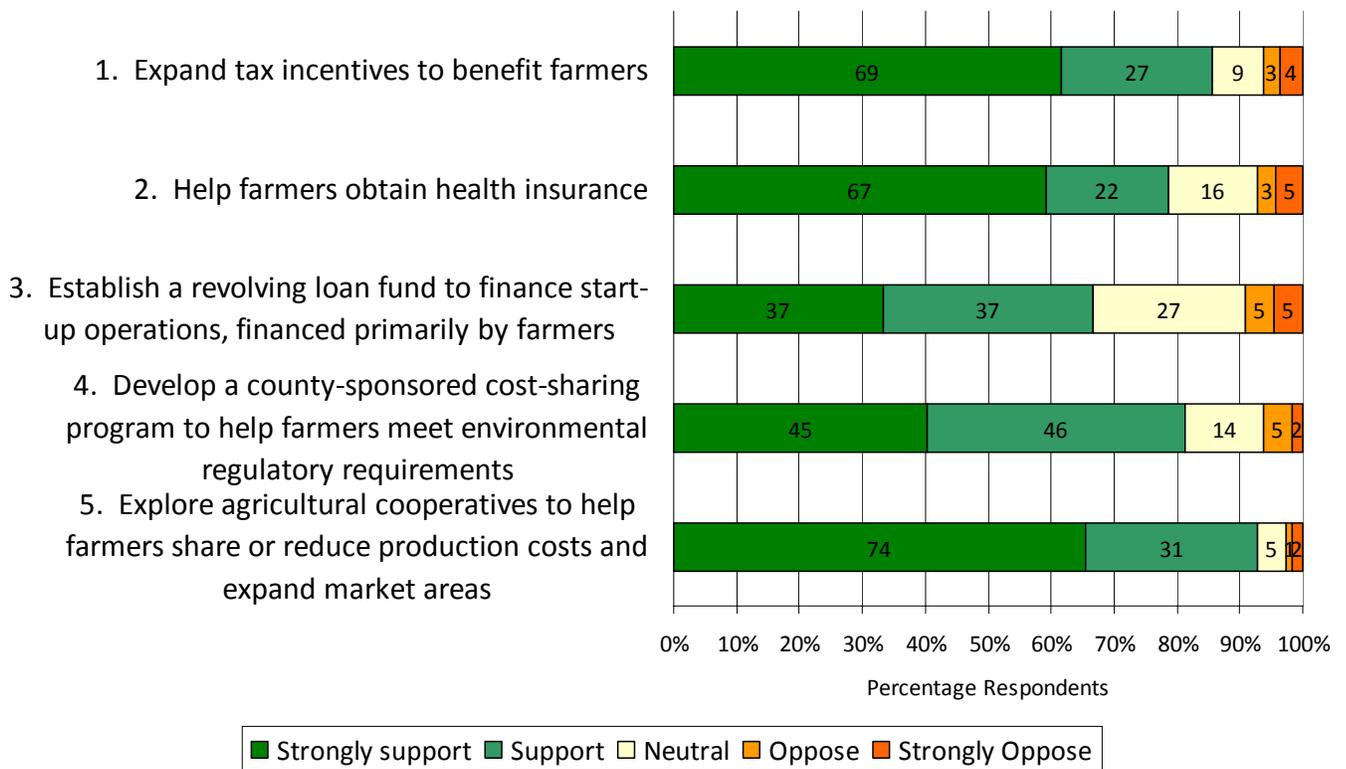


■ Strongly support 
 ■ Support 
 ■ Neutral 
 ■ Oppose 
 ■ Strongly Oppose

### Challenge # 3: High production cost and low return for farm products

Respondents indicated whether they support or oppose the five strategies indicated in the *Farm Preservation Strategies Report* to deal with high production cost and low return for farm products.

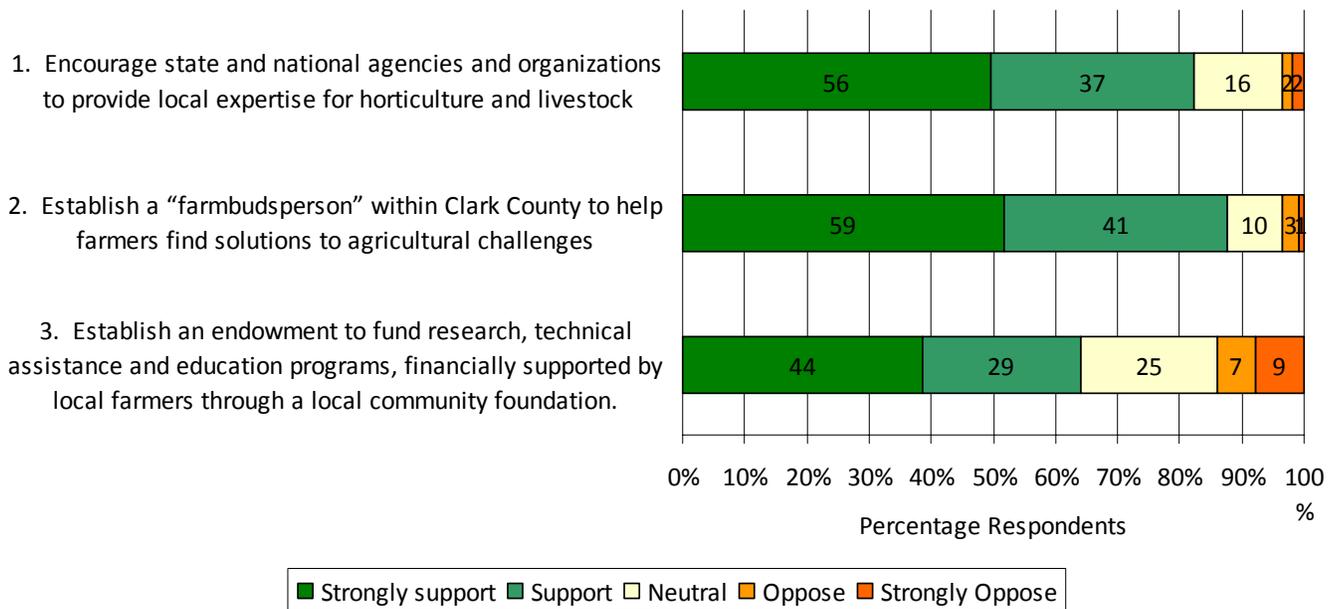
Over sixty percent (60%) of respondents strongly supported two of the strategies: to expand tax incentives to benefit farmers, and to explore agricultural cooperatives to help farmers share or reduce production costs and expand market areas. The least popular strategy was establishing a revolving loan fund to finance start-up operations, financed primarily by farmers.



### Challenge # 4: Need for more expert advice for local farmers

Respondents indicated whether they support or oppose the three strategies indicated in the *Farm Preservation Strategies Report* to deal with the need for more expert advice for local farmers

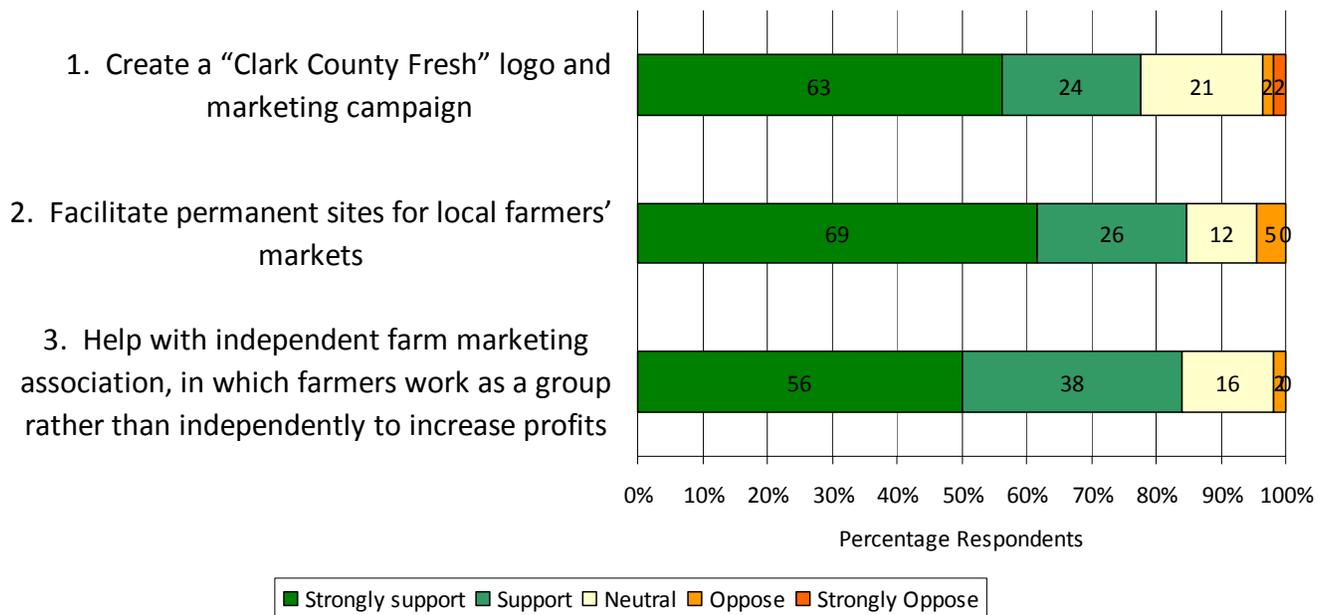
About fifty percent (50%) of respondents strongly supported the first two strategies, establishing an endowment to fund research, technical assistance and education programs financially supported by local farmers through a local community foundation; and establish a “farmbudsperson” within Clark County to help farmers find solutions to agricultural challenges.



### Challenge # 5: Need for better marketing and promotion

Respondents indicated whether they support or oppose the three strategies indicated in the *Farm Preservation Strategies Report* to deal with the need for better marketing and promotion.

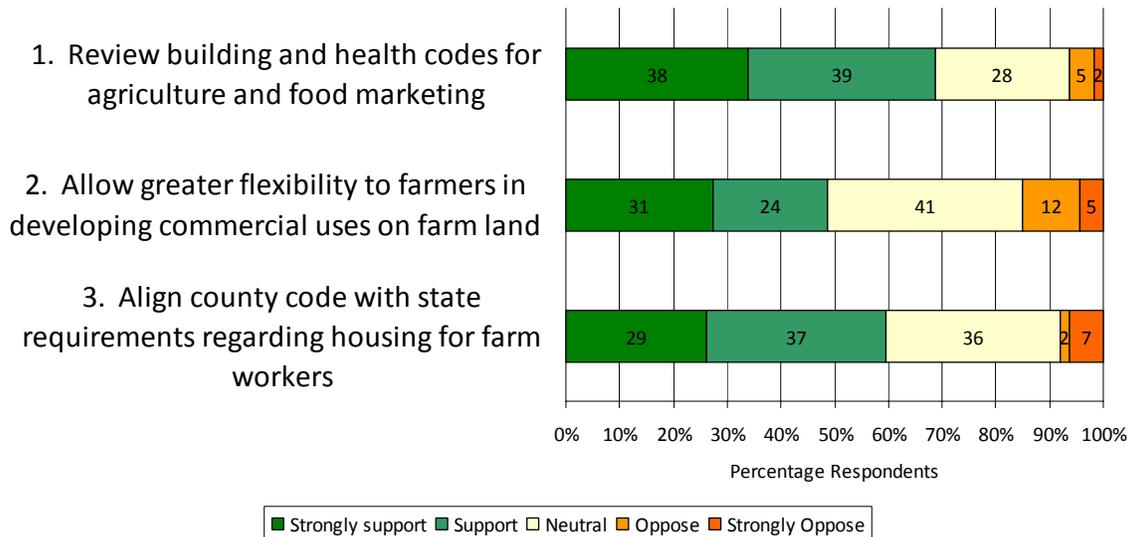
Over sixty percent (60%) of respondents (69 people) strongly supported the strategy to facilitate permanent sites for local farmers’ markets, and over fifty percent of respondents (63 people) strongly supported creating a “Clark County Fresh” logo and marketing campaign.



### Challenge # 6: Regulation

Respondents indicated whether they support or oppose the three strategies indicated in the *Farm Preservation Strategies Report* to deal with regulation.

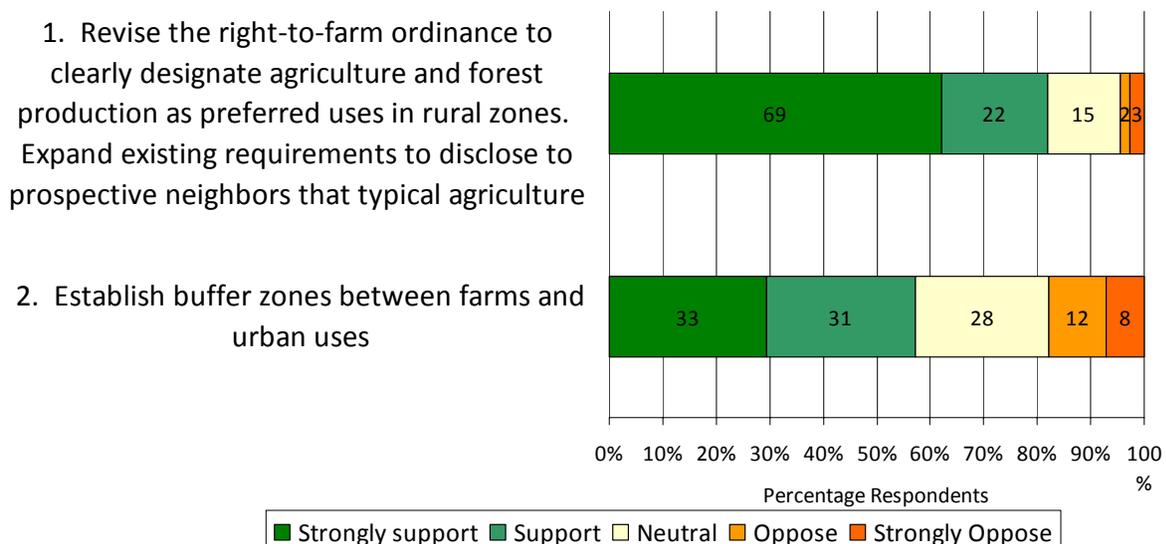
None of the strategies were very highly supported, but the most strongly favored strategy was to review building and health codes for agriculture and food marketing.



### Challenge # 7: Conflicts related to increasing population

Respondents indicated whether they support or oppose the two strategies indicated in the *Farm Preservation Strategies Report* to deal with conflicts related to increasing population.

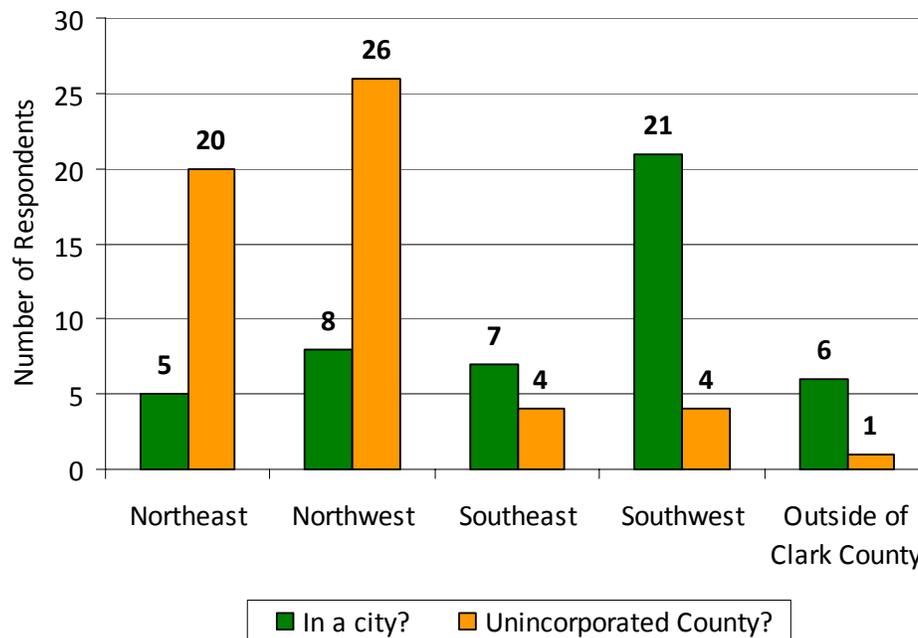
Over sixty percent (60%) of respondents (69 people) strongly supported the strategy to revise the right-to-farm ordinance to clearly designate agriculture and forest production as preferred uses in rural zones, and expand existing requirements to disclose to prospective neighbors that typical agriculture and forestry activities will occur on adjacent properties.



## Demographic Information

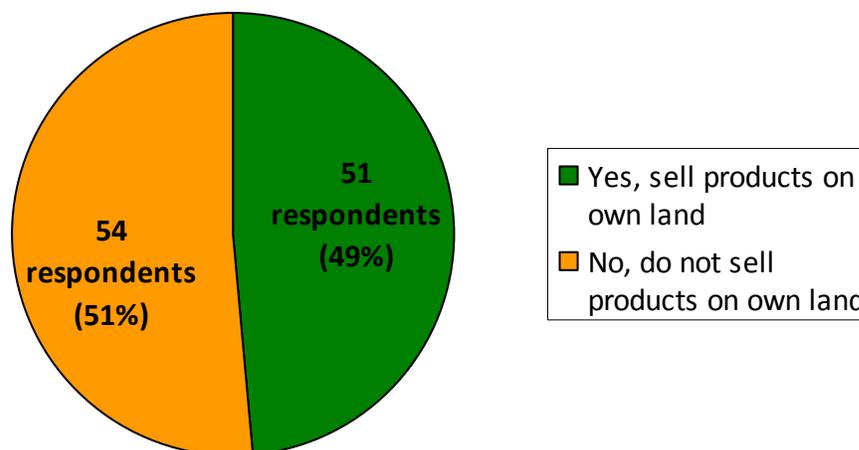
### ***Where in Clark County do you live?***

One hundred (100) respondents indicated where in Clark County they live, and whether this was in a city or in unincorporated Clark County. Of those, twenty six (26) respondents live in northwest unincorporated Clark County and 20 in northeast unincorporated Clark County. Few respondents live outside of Clark County.



### ***Do you grow or sell products on your land?***

One hundred and five (105) respondents indicated whether or not they grow or sell products on their land. Of those, fifty four (54) respondents, or fifty one percent (51%), indicated that they do not grow or sell products on their land. Fifty one (51) respondents, or forty nine percent (49%), indicated that they do sell products on their land.

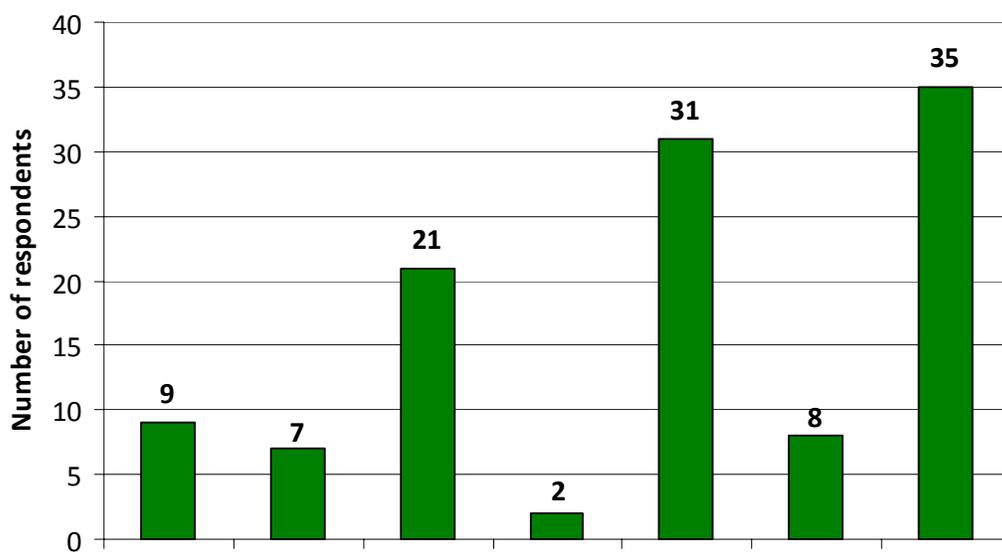


**How are you involved in agriculture?**

Of those respondents who indicated they do sell or grow products on their land, thirty one (31) respondents, or forty six percent (46%), indicated that they grow or sell food products. Thirty five (35) respondents, or fifty one percent (51%), indicated that they sold other products, or were involved in agriculture in some other way. Below is a list of products and, in parenthesis, the number of respondents involved in the indicated form of agriculture (note that respondents were able to make more than one selection):

*Products grown or sold on land:*

- Wood products (9)
- Nursery (7)
- Livestock (21)
- Christmas trees (2)
- Food products (31)
- Fiber (8)
- Other (35), including:
  - Personal backyard or home garden or green house (8)
  - Livestock (4)
  - CSA Participant (3)
  - Member of Vancouver Food Cooperative (2)
  - Horses (2)
  - Hay (2)
  - Grass seed production (1)
  - Apiary/honey (1)
  - Secondary forestry products - mushrooms, medicinals, furniture, etc. (1)
  - Small grains, clover seeds (1)
  - Backyard gardening that feeds neighborhood cooperatively (1)
  - Tree farm in another state (1)
  - Dairy (1)



## Summary of Written Comments Received

*NOTE: The viewpoints expressed are not a statistically valid cross section of the Clark County population. They only represent the opinions of the small spectrum of residents that chose to comment.*

A collection of written comments were received by Clark County during the course of the public comment period beginning on November 3 through November 17, 2008. A summary of the consistent themes heard can be summarized in the following topics:

- Support for local permanent Farmer's Markets within unincorporated Clark County.
- Concern over locating funding resources.
- Support for a rural lands update of the Clark County Comprehensive Plan.
- Support for maintaining and expanding tax incentives for farmers (including more flexibility for varied farming practices).
- Ensure regulatory practices are not prohibitive to farming (i.e. proposed Stormwater Ordinance and draft Solid Waste Management Plan).
- Opposition to Transfer of Development Rights.
- Encouragement of locally produced food products through collaborative marketing and education efforts (i.e. "Clark County Fresh logo").
- Support for using publicly owned land for start-up farming.
- Support for environmental protection and prohibitive use of toxins.
- Support for weed management.
- Concern over securing water rights.
- Promotion of and education on personal farming and backyard gardening.
- Support for purchase of conservation easements.
- Support for creation of agricultural production districts.
- Support for a "Farm-link" program and incentives for retiring farmers.
- Support for preserving the 78<sup>th</sup> Street/WSU Property for Agricultural use, including a farming incubator.
- Utilization of edible landscaping on public lands to promote this type of practice on private lands.
- Support for increasing farmer to farmer and farm improvement research and education opportunities locally.

## Attachments

Open House Flyer

Open House Postcard

Open House Handouts:

- Executive Summary
- Comment Form
- Poster Board Note sheet

Open House Sign in sheet summary

Newspaper Article from the Reflector, November 5, 2008

Newspaper Article from the Columbian, November 12, 2008

Newspaper Article from the Camas-Washougal Post Record, October 28, 2008

Summary of comments, online survey responses, and written communication received during the course of the project.