

## King Conservation District

### 2015 Program Focus Areas – FACT SHEET

#### Regional Food System and Sustainable Agriculture



**Challenge:** The Local Food System should connect healthy food consumption with healthy local farming practices, but it is under stress:

- Food deserts and a lack of access to healthy food in our underserved communities are growing concerns.
- The ability of farmers to launch, sustain, and expand local production, and to invest in long term conservation practices, is threatened by an already low-return business that has experienced steady declines in revenues for over a decade.
- At the same time, we are asking farmers to be leaders in helping to solve public natural resource crises, including salmon recovery, water quality, and climate change.

**NEED:** Significant, regional investments throughout the food system to: improve food access, invest in local food system as an economic growth sector, begin to address storage and processing obstacles, strengthen direct market connections at farmers markets, CSAs, and more. A healthy local food system means healthier people, healthier farms, and healthier natural resources.

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### The Problem

Strengthening the regional food economy was perhaps the most discussed and ultimately the highest priority of the 2013 King Conservation District/King County Conservation Panel and Task Force. The discussion focused on enhancing the regional food system through a combination of initiatives, grants, and synergy with existing or expanded KCD services.

King County farmers produced \$120 million worth of food in 2012, down from \$127 million in 2007, ranking 18<sup>th</sup> of the state's 39 counties. King County consumers, however, spend \$6 billion on food, including \$600 million on raw food. Demand for fresh locally-grown food is growing, but social, economic, and infrastructural obstacles stand in the way. Price points for food that deliver a living wage to farmers while remaining affordable to a broad consumer base prove elusive in the absence of some market

*"By addressing food system issues systematically, the region can protect agricultural land, promote fresh food consumption, and support local food and farm based business to improve the health of the local food economy."*

*- Puget Sound Regional Council -*

*VISION 2040*

intervention. Processing and storage facilities are few, creating farm-to-market challenges for small farmers. Institutional buyers such as hospitals and school districts have not yet embraced local suppliers in a meaningful way.

These obstacles suggest a need for public sector innovation. Though local food stories are ubiquitous and celebrated chefs increasingly highlight sustainability and seasonality in their menus and preparation, the fact remains that farmers are, paradoxically, simply not sharing in the renaissance. The most recent survey of King County farmers found that incomes in the sector are declining.

The King Conservation District is uniquely positioned to coordinate and leverage a range of projects, programs, and services we and our partners are already well-equipped to deploy.

## The Future

We propose to work with our member jurisdictions, King County, Seattle Tilth, Cascade Harvest Coalition, Pike Place Market, the Puget Sound Regional Food Council, and others across the food system spectrum to reduce obstacles on the farm, during processing and storage, within distribution channels, and at market. We will build on existing success, such as Seattle Tilth’s Farm Works in Auburn, and work together to innovate new pilot programs to learn from and adapt.

Current Program Outcomes	Proposed Additional Program Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently, KCD is involved in a variety of regional roundtables and policy bodies examining ways to grow and maintain a sustainable agricultural economy.</li> <li>KCD is partnering with the City of Auburn, Auburn International Farmers Market, Seattle Tilth, Auburn Food Bank, and Washington CAN to implement <b>Good Food Bag Market Bucks</b> for low-income shoppers to use at the Farmers Market this summer. This program will expand markets for local farmers by increasing their consumer base and expand access to healthy, locally-grown produce to low-income community members.</li> </ul>	<p>KCD proposes to develop and administer a robust program of grants and services that address the following regional goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve food access</li> <li>Invest in local food system as an economic growth sector</li> <li>Begin to address storage and processing obstacles</li> <li>Strengthen direct market connections at farmers markets</li> <li>Expand CSAs</li> </ul> <p>A healthy local food system means healthier people, healthier farms, and healthier natural resources.</p>
<p><b>.2 FTE</b> <b>\$20,880</b></p>	<p><b>2.2 FTE</b> <b>\$1,096,500</b></p> <p><b>PROPOSED TOTAL:</b></p>

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**Deirdre Grace, Community Relations Manager**  
**King Conservation District**  
**Deirdre.grace@kingcd.org**  
**425-282-1902**



Courtesy Seattle Tilth