

PCC FARMLAND TRUST STRATEGIC PLAN 2012-2015

INTRODUCTION: In 1999, farmer Nash Huber approached PCC Natural Markets about development threats to a 97-acre parcel of farmland near his own leased farm in Sequim. That event led to the creation of a new 501(c)(3) nonprofit that became the PCC Farmland Trust, the only farmland trust in the United States that is entirely focused on organic agriculture.

Since then, PCC Farmland Trust has saved nine organic farms totaling 865 acres, spread across the state of Washington. It has also built a stewardship program, grown its staff size and expertise, developed its fundraising capabilities, and built deep ties with farmers, fellow nonprofits and governmental entities, all in support of its core mission:

Saving local organic farmland forever.

The greater landscape has changed since 1999 as well. The public focus on local food and on regional food security has intensified. There is a groundswell of interest from a new generation of potential farmers, and continued growth in farmers markets and other outlets for local produce. At the same time, development pressures have continued to threaten farmland and to raise the price of land, mitigated temporarily only somewhat by the economic downturn in recent years. Rich farmland continues to be lost at an alarming rate. Sustainable farming as a viable livelihood is increasingly difficult.

As of this writing, the PCC Farmland Trust is a healthy, growing organization. It is fiscally sound and has continued its fundraising success even through the downturn. The Trust has saved two new farms in the past year and several exciting new projects are in the pipeline. All its farms are working farms producing food in a manner that restores and improves nearby habitats. In 2011, the board elected to pursue a new strategic plan to help guide the Trust in the next three to five years, and to continue and build on its success to date. As part of this process, a planning committee comprising board members, staff and additional volunteers has held board retreats, engaged with organizational consultants and conducted in-depth interviews with 30 individual stakeholders drawn from a variety of fields. This strategic plan is a result of that effort.

The primary strategic discussion in all phases of this planning process has been the question of geographic focus. The importance of “critical mass” in economic sustainability for agriculture has been emphasized by the American Farmland Trust, which helped fund a recent study of critical mass in the Willamette Valley. When there are enough working farms in proximity, it can have measurable effects on availability of infrastructure (marketing channels, labor, and equipment and other physical infrastructure) as well as providing support for the exchange of knowledge between farmers, and the mentoring and training of new farmers. A concentration of organic farms in a valley could measurably improve the ecological attributes of a watershed.

For the Trust, focusing on specific geographic regions can also help by leveraging ongoing ties with local partner organizations (including funding partners, like county governments), by building trust with the local agricultural community, and by deepening local expertise. Finally, by measuring our success in

building concentrations of protected farmland, we build our capacity to replicate the experience in other regions where farmland is threatened.

Overall, stakeholder feedback during the planning process has been overwhelmingly positive. The message, boiled down, has been: do more, do it faster. In that spirit, the Trust (board and staff) are committing to the following goals as a way to deepen our impact while maintaining the health and capacity of the organization, all while remaining true to our mission – which remains unchanged.

GOAL: Agricultural Focus Areas

The PCC Farmland Trust will continue to be a state-wide organization with the mission of preserving organic farmland with investments based on existing priorities and selection criteria. However, the organization will target their conservation efforts on selected “focus areas” in the Central Puget Sound area where a critical mass of farms could be preserved through the Trust’s efforts. For example, the Puyallup and Snoqualmie River Valleys might be candidates for this designation.

In support of this goal, staff will:

- Select one or more areas for focus based on criteria developed to guide this decision
- Implement a pilot project from which a case study and lessons can be developed for use in future agricultural focus areas
- Seek opportunities to conserve agricultural land in concentration, in the focus area(s)

GOAL: Strategic Partnerships

Strengthen existing and develop new associations to carry out the Trust’s conservation, community education and stewardship activities.

In support of this goal, staff will:

- Develop funding and non-monetary support from key government entities, including those within the Trust's focus areas
- Collaborate with other conservation organizations to increase public awareness of the need for and benefits of farmland conservation and organic, sustainable farm practices
- Build and strengthen key local partnerships that will enable success in specific locations

GOAL: Farms and farmers

Engage with farmers and farm businesses so that the land conserved by the Trust is continuously farmed to meet organic standards and best practices for habitat restoration.

In support of this goal, staff will:

- Assist farmers on conserved land with ecological restoration projects
- Assist farmers on conserved land to maintain USDA organic certification
- Find viable new farm businesses for conserved lands
- Explore ways to support agricultural infrastructure in selected focus areas, such as direct farm-to-market pipelines via local food distribution entities

Goal: Organizational Capability

Expand board and staff governance, management and operations as needed to address the goals of the strategic plan.

- Seek Land Trust Alliance accreditation, installing the professional standards and practices recommended for all land trusts.
- Grow the fundraising goals and related tactics in order to raise additional capital needed for land transactions and operations.
- Develop metrics by which the Trust's progress can be tracked over the length of this strategic plan. Develop a scorecard by which the board and key stakeholders can see this progress, using measures such as:
 - Numerical achievements: acres and farms preserved
 - Land market impacts: percentage of protected parcels that are actively farmed
 - Local agricultural economies: health of local support services in areas of concentration
 - Long-term conservation: health of ecosystem and watershed
 - Fiscal health: balance sheets and fundraising barometers
 - Education and communication: public events in which PCCFT participates, public participation in the events held by PCCFT and media mentions of the Trust's activities