

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Washington State Food Policy Forum

OCTOBER 1, 2026



Agenda

1:00pm **Welcome & Get Settled** (10 min)

1:10pm **Sharing and Elevating Forum Recommendations** (20 min)

Learning Session

1:30pm **Insight into Succession Planning and its Importance**
(20 min)

1:50pm **Producer Panel** (60 min)

2:50pm **Succession Planning Services that Exist in
Washington State** (20 min)

3:20pm **Closing Succession Planning Gaps: Lessons from
Other States** (30 min)

3:50pm **Closing Reflections** (10 min)

4:00pm **Adjourn**

Purpose & Objectives

- *Discuss Forum members' interest in engaging with legislators and agency representatives to elevate the visibility of the Forum's work and increase awareness of its ideas and recommendations.*
- *Create a shared understanding of what succession planning is and how it supports and sustains agricultural viability in Washington.*
- *Learn from generational producers firsthand how they navigated or are currently navigating farm transitions, state programs that are most valuable, and policy changes they would like to see to support succession planning in Washington.*
- *Understand what succession planning policies and programs have been successful in other states and whether they can be applied in Washington.*

Sharing and Elevating Forum Recommendations

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Engaging with Legislators and Agency Representatives

Goal:

- Elevate the visibility of the Forum's work and increase awareness of its ideas and recommendations

Potential ideas:

- Forum members join a scheduled Hill Day to showcase recommendations and ways of working
- Develop a 1-pager to serve as an invitation to legislators to engage with the Forum

Ag Land Protection Team: Succession Planning Learning Session

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Team Roster

Addie Candib	American Farmland Trust
Caleb Gwerder	WA State Farm Bureau
Chris Elder	King County
Heather Wendt	WA Association of Conservation Districts
Hilary Aten	WA State Conservation Commission
KayDee Gilkey	WA Association of Wheat Growers
Nate Lewis	WA Farmland Trust
Representative Dye	WA State Legislature

Insight into Succession Planning and Its Importance

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

What is Succession Planning?



First Question for farmers/ranchers to consider:

Farmer and non-farm siblings' wants for the future of the farm may require modification and compromise, making a succession plan critical

What do you want to see happen to your farm?

Proposed Succession Planning Definition

"A process of decision-making that protects your land's agricultural and forest production while preserving family relationships and enhancing community development" – Washington State Conservation Commission, Office of Farmland Preservation

Succession Planning Statistics

- 94% of Washington's 31,000 farms are family owned, spanning roughly 13.7 million acres. One-third of the state's entire landscape.
- Washington has 60,453 Farm Producers. Average Age 59.3 years old. We are facing a Tsunami of Transition.
- Total farmland acreage decreased by 10% since 1997. The number of farms has decreased, but acreage per farm has increased 5.4%. Farmers are asset rich and cash poor.
- In 1997, present production value was equivalent to \$5.75 Billion. Today, it hovers between \$12.8 billion and \$14.0 billion Production costs have exceeded revenues for negative net farm income, impacting liquidity and increasing debt.



Common Succession Planning Barriers

- **Economic Barriers**

- Tax policy and transition costs
- Risk of losing farm capital
- Lack of financial planning support
- Broader economic pressures

- **Land-Related Barriers**

- Farmland conversion and loss
- Difficulty accessing land for new farmers

- **Social and Policy-level Barriers**

- Knowledge gaps among policymakers
- Complex family and interpersonal dynamics
- Low urgency among farmers
- Lack of coordinated state-level strategy

Ways to Alleviate These Barriers:

- Protect the institutional memory of agriculture
- Evaluate and plan for risks of keeping farmland in production
- Consult professionals such as certified mediators, tax advisors, financial planners, and farm business consultants.



Producer Panel

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Panelists

- Kevin Jensen – Riverbrook Ranch, Tenino, WA
 - Beef cattle ranch and Christmas tree farm
- Mark Charlton – Charlton Basin Farms, Ellensburg, WA
 - Diversified row crops, hay, and cattle
- Troy Lenssen – Lenssen Dairy, Lynden WA
 - Dairy Farm



Succession Planning Services that Exist in Washington State

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Washington State-based Services

- Core elements of succession planning resources in Washington State:
- Farm succession planning & navigation
- Farm linking
- Operational support for transitions
- Land protection
- Private sector services
 - Business planning
 - Estate planning
 - Legal support
 - Financing support
 - Land conservation support

Washington State-based Services - Education/Assistance

Organization	Program Name	Support Provided
American Farmland Trust	Land Transfer Support Program	Direct assistance to farmers, ranchers, and landowners on succession and transfer planning.
Washington State University - Extension	Ties to the Land and Cultivating Success programs	Training for forest and ag landowners.
Washington State Conservation Commission	Office of Farmland Preservation	Programming support for farm transfer planning.
Fulcrum Institute	Dispute Resolution Clinic	Certified USDA ag mediation service provider for WA.

Washington State-based Services - Farm Linking

Organization	Program Name	Support Provided
Washington Farmland Trust	Farm to Farmer Program	Land linking service and direct client land search support.
Thurston Conservation District	South Sound Farmlink program	Land linking platform for farmland seekers and farmland sellers or lessors.

Washington State-based Services - Land Protection

Organization	Program Name	Support Provided
Land Trusts (statewide)	Agricultural Conservation Easement & Buy Protect Sell	Direct assistance to farmers, ranchers, and landowners interested in land conservation options during farm transitions.
Housing Finance Commission	Farm Protection & Affordability Investment (Farm PAI) in Washington	Provides loans for land trusts to buy at risk farmland and transfer it to the next generation.
Local Government	County PDR & TDR programs	Purchase of agricultural conservation easements

Private Sector Business Support



- Estate planning
- Land use attorneys
- Financial advisors
- Financing & business planning
- Realtors
- Appraisers
- Tax experts
- Lenders

Local & Regional Collaboration

Example: Jefferson LandWorks Collaborative

Partners:

- Craft3
- Jefferson Conservation District
- Jefferson County Farmers Markets
- Jefferson Land Trust
- North Olympic Development Council
- Port Townsend Food Co-op
- WSU Jefferson County Extension

Closing Succession Planning Gaps: Lessons from Other States

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Farmland Transition & Access in Washington State

Research Findings & Opportunities for Exploration

Kellie Henwood | WSU Extension | October 1, 2026

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

About This Research

The Research Question

Which farmland transition incentive models from across the U.S. are most effective in supporting affordable land access and successful farm transfer — and how might those models translate to Washington State's context, including our lack of a state income tax?

Methods

- Literature & policy review of national and state-level programs
- Comparative analysis of four policy model types
- Semi-structured interviews with 6 experts across 5 WA agencies and organizations

Washington Farmland: The Scale of the Challenge

50%

of WA farmland
lost since 1970

~60

average age of
WA farmers today

200K

acres at risk of
loss by 2040

-\$300M

net returns to
operators in 2024

What Does Policy Actually Do? Four Approaches

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Four Types of Policy — and the Barriers They Target

Policy Type	How It Works	Barrier It Targets	Example
A Market-Shaping	Taxes farmland on its farm value, not its sale value — reducing pressure to sell	Land affordability (holding costs)	WA Open Space Taxation Act; Vermont Use Value Appraisal
B Transition-Enabling / Tax Credits	Gives tax credits to landowners who sell or lease to a beginning farmer	Succession — incentivising transfer	Iowa & Nebraska Beginning Farmer Tax Credit
C Direct Financial Assistance	Grants or low-interest loans to help new farmers with the purchase price	Capital access — upfront cost of buying land	Minnesota Down Payment Assistance Program
D Integrated / Hybrid	Combines land protection, price restrictions, and buyer requirements in one tool	Affordability + succession + long-term access	Buy-Protect-Sell; price-restricted resale agreements

Note: Some programs combine elements of more than one category.

Three Programs Worth Knowing About

⚠ Does Not Translate

Iowa — Beginning Farmer Tax Credit

Type B: Transition-Enabling

How it works:

Landowners who sell or lease to a qualifying beginning farmer receive a state income tax credit of up to 15% of the sale or cash rent amount.

Barrier addressed:

Succession — creates a financial incentive for landowners to choose a beginning farmer buyer over a higher bidder

WA relevance:

Washington has no state income tax, so this mechanism does not directly apply. It is included because it illustrates the kind of landowner incentive that is missing from our toolkit — and raises the question of what alternative incentive structures might fill that gap.

✓ Potentially Translatable

Minnesota — Down Payment Assistance Grant

Type C: Direct Financial Assistance

How it works:

Grants of up to \$20,000 to eligible beginning farmers purchasing their first farm, with matching fund requirements and minimum ownership periods.

Barrier addressed:

Capital access — lowers the upfront financial barrier to ownership for people who could sustain a farm but cannot compete on purchase price

WA relevance:

Washington has existing programs like FarmPAI that operate on similar principles. My research suggests there may be room to expand direct assistance tools, particularly for beginning, BIPOC, and historically underserved farmers.

✓ Potentially Translatable

Maryland — NextGen Farmland Acquisition Program

Type D: Integrated / Hybrid

How it works:

Down payment assistance tied to a long-term conservation agreement, ensuring the land stays in farming and affordable to future farmers even after resale.

Barrier addressed:

Affordability + succession — combines access for the current buyer with protection for the next generation

WA relevance:

Washington already uses conservation agreements for land protection. My research found that pairing those agreements with price-at-transfer provisions is an area worth exploring — though it requires careful legal design within our statutes.

Perspectives from Washington State Experts

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Five Patterns from Expert Interviews

1 Land price is the most immediate barrier

- Values driven by development competition
- Farmland is often a landowner's primary retirement asset
- Purchase prices far exceed what most farm operations can support

4 Integrated tools are the most promising

- Address price, buyer eligibility, and long-term use together
- Intervene at the point of transfer, not around its edges

2 Succession support is underfunded and fragmented

- Technical assistance exists but is stretched thin
- Programs operate in silos
- Scale of need far exceeds current capacity

5 Farmland must be treated as critical infrastructure

- Market forces alone will continue to erode the land base
- Durable solutions require sustained investment and political will

3 No income tax means a limited tool kit

- Cannot adopt Iowa/Nebraska-style tax credit models
- Requires creative alternatives, not just substitutions

What My Research Points To

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Areas Worth Exploring for Washington State

1 Grow and connect transition support services

- Technical assistance is underfunded and fragmented
- Connect AFT, OFP, WSU Extension, and land trusts
- Multiply impact without starting from scratch

2 Expand public investment in farmland access

- Conservation programs protect land but not always affordability
- Pair protection tools with price and buyer-type provisions at transfer
- Approach used by other states that may fit WA context

3 Explore non-income-tax incentive mechanisms

- Real estate excise tax models (e.g. San Juan County)
- Sales and use tax deferrals for beginning farmers
- Estate transfer provisions beyond family inheritance

4 Expand capital access for beginning and underserved farmers

- Capital access is the most persistent barrier
- BIPOC and historically underserved farmers face compounding disadvantages
- FarmPAI points in the right direction — scale and broaden

5 Pursue coordination across agencies and programs

- No single tool is sufficient
- Align conservation, affordability, and transition in the same pipeline
- WA has the partners — what is missing is a coordinating structure

The Core Finding

Farmland is critical infrastructure for Washington's food system and economy — and it deserves the same sustained public investment we give to roads, water systems, and broadband.

The tools exist. What the evidence suggests is still missing is coordination, sustained investment, and political will.



**Farmland is critical
infrastructure — treat it that way**



**Integrated approaches
outperform single-purpose tools**



**Washington has the partners
— coordination is what's missing**

Closing Reflections & Adjourn

WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

Looking Ahead

- **Topical team meetings will be held in October for the following teams:**
 - Impacts of Climate Change
 - Ag Land Protection & Next Generation Farming
 - Ag Viability
 - Regional Food Infrastructure
- **Next Forum meeting is on December 3**