

November 2020 VOTER article by Loretta Seppanen: **Ad Hoc LWV Committee Tracking Thurston County Review of Agricultural Policies and Programs**

Last month the Thurston County Community Planning staff initiated a project to explore county policies and programs related to agriculture. This review is a response to public concern at the rapid farmland loss. As the table below shows, Thurston County lost 14,388 acres of farmland, almost 3,000 acres a year between 2012 and 2016. The total acreage lost, and the rate of loss, was faster than other counties on the I-5 side of Puget Sound.

This Community-Driven Review of Agriculture Policies and Programs (link <https://www.thurstoncount.ywa.gov/planning/Pages/comp-plan-agriculture.aspx>) includes, but is not limited to, review of land use policies and zoning, county programs that provide incentives for farmland preservation and regulations. The project is led by Community Planning Manager, Jennifer Davis. Davis is currently working closely with the county's Agricultural Advisory Committee and other stakeholders to define the issues to be addressed in 2021. The tentative project timeline stretches across the remainder of 2020 through to policy actions and program changes approved by the Thurston County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) at the end of next year.

The board of the Thurston LWV accepted a proposal for an ad hoc committee to keep LWV members informed about this county work. Already on the committee are LWV members Loretta Seppanen who has worked on farm issues for the past three year as the Thurston Comprehensive Plan was updated, Peggy Smith who brings experience from past state LWV agricultural policy work, Nathaniel Jones who addressed similar City of Olympia land use issues, and, in a consultant role for county policy and code issues, Shelley Kneip. Would you like to spend some of your "stay home, stay healthy" time in an exploration of how the Comprehensive Plan policies and county programs and codes relate to farming? Consider joining the committee by connecting with Loretta at laurel.lodge@comcast.net.

The committee will keep LWV members informed in the Voter and on the TCLWV web page. The committee will ask all members to engage with the project when a community survey about your local farm concerns and interests becomes available in late November or early December.