

Diversifying Agricultural Activities in Rural Zones

Summary

Agriculture-related activities, such as event agricultural-tourism, the processing and sales of agricultural products, incubation of farm products, distribution and education and training, provide farmers with supplemental income that help make their farms viable. Local governments can update rural zoning regulations to permit activities that complement agricultural uses. A regional network of food processing facilities that serve small and medium sized growers also could be established.

Tool Type and Potential Partners

	Public	Private	Nonprofit	Academic	Partnership
Incentive					
Investment					
Plan	X				
Policy	X				
Program	X	X	X		X
Project		X			
Regulation	X				

Current Context

State regulations for rural lands permit many farm-related uses as long as they are subordinate to the primary agricultural use and don't impact neighboring farms. Some diversified uses are allowed as home occupations. A survey of counties throughout the Portland regional foodshed (Clackamas, Columbia, Multnomah, Washington, Yamhill) shows a broad range of regulations on ag-related uses in agriculture and rural zones that are often more restrictive than State requirements. Wineries are allowed in all five counties, but regulations on other activities such as event hosting, farmstays, farm stands, signs and parking, storage, and the processing and sales of agricultural products vary. This indicates that perceptions of what state regulations do and do not allow differ from county to county.

On-site processing of agricultural products is of particular interest for urban area farmers. When asked in a survey of Portland region foodshed farmers, 36 percent of respondents identify "value added and processing activities" as a primary source of their gross farm income. Value-added food products will continue to be a major feature of the regional food economy and the region has significant food processing expertise. Currently small scale processing locations such as USDA certified collective kitchens and small-medium meat processors do not appear to be adequate to the potential demand.

Barriers/Challenges

Urban area farmers face many unique challenges and often struggle to maintain an economically viable farming operation. Agriculture-related activities can bring a second stream of income to help these farms survive. Potential impacts of traffic, noise and odors are a primary concern. There also is some concern that wineries are becoming more event-centered than for agriculture/viticulture uses. It is not clear how newer agricultural innovations such as demonstration or educational farms, aquaculture, hydroponics, and aquaponics will be accommodated in rural zones.

Opportunity

The emergence of broad interest in local healthy food from the region presents local governments with the opportunity to develop their own strategies to strengthen the viability of their agricultural industries. Many of the agriculture-related activities described above are permitted by state regulations. Counties may want to work with state representatives to ensure their agricultural codes allow the broadest range of agriculture-related uses. Counties also may wish to advocate for expanding the list of allowable agriculture-related uses. One possible tool would be an agri-business zone or overlay that allows more intensive agricultural uses.

Oregon Senate Bill 960 was signed into law in June 2011 providing for increased agri-tourism activities on land zoned for exclusive farm use. Specifically, it “creates processes by which counties may conditionally approve agri-tourism events and other commercial events or activities related to and supportive of agriculture in EFU zones zoned for exclusive farm use (EFU), including events in EFU areas designated as rural or urban reserves.” The law provides an opportunity for counties to review their land use ordinances and diversify the list of permitted and conditionally permitted activities, while minimizing impacts, such as noise and traffic, to adjacent properties.¹

Additionally, local governments may wish to work with the private sector, including the Northwest Food Processors Association, to stimulate a regional network of small scale food processing facilities for small and medium growers to increase value of food produced in the region and potential for exports.

Proposed Actions²

Local governments can:

- Review state and local statutes regulating agriculture-related activities in natural resource and rural zones.
- Update local statutes to diversify allowed and conditionally allowed activities that may include:
 - Community kitchens
 - Educational classes and programs

¹ Oregon State Legislature. Oregon Senate Bill 960.

<http://www.leg.state.or.us/11reg/measpdf/sb0900.dir/sb0960.en.pdf>

² Clackamas County Master Plan for Agritourism Development (detailed information not yet available).

- Event hosting
- Bed & breakfasts
- Farm stands
- On-site processing
- Tours
- U-Pick
- Provide agri-tourism training for planning and code enforcement staff.
- Develop codes that clearly accommodate educational and incubation farms, small and medium sized farm related food processing, aquaculture, hydroponics, and aquaponics and other advanced and intensive food production techniques.
- Create informational materials to educate rural landowners on allowed uses and packages of pre-approved farm site plans for fast track approval.
- Advocate for further changes to state regulations to allow uses such as farmstays and farm restaurants.
- Allow a coordinated system of high-quality agri-tourism road signs.
- Work with the private sector to develop a vision and action plan for a regional network of food processing facilities that serve small and medium sized growers based on global best practices.

Resources, Models, Best Practices

The Master Plan for Agri-tourism Development in Clackamas County was recently completed to diversify agricultural activities in rural zones.